A POCKET GUIDE

to

THE EMPIRE

and its environs

Being a Description of the Lands
and the Chief Features of their Histories

DEDICATED

To our Revered Father and Generous Patron,
His Majesty the Emperor Uriel Septim VII

Promulgated under the Authority of the Imperial Geographical Society

3E 432

PRAISE BE AKATOSH AND ALL THE DIVINES
APPROVED

Uriel VII, Blessed of Heaven, Emperor, and Father and Son of Emperors,

Inspiration of Faith and Safeguard of Justice, Praise with Great Praisings!

May the Light of Your Wisdom and the Glory of Your Reign

Illuminate this Humble Work of Hand and Heart!

Come to me, AKATOSH, for without you, my resolution falters, and my pen is still and dry, though all the seas were full of ink, and the sky my parchment of dawn.

Come to me, TALOS, for without you, my Lord and Emperor springs from rootless dust, and the Empire is scattered before the winds of war and ignorance.

Come to me, JULIANOS, for without you, my wit is weak to sort the wheat from the chaff, and my eyes should neither know the true from the false, nor sense from folly, nor justice from prejudice and interest.

Come to me, KYNARETH, for without you, I might not know the mysteries of the world, and so blind and in error, I might consume and profane the abundance of your bountiful treasures.

Come to me, ZENITHAR, for without you, like a child, I might fiddle and fret, when only through struggle and labor may I craft a work worthy of your name and the name of my patron.

Come to me, STENDARR, for without you, I might be deaf to the manswarm murmurings of thy people, and forgetting their need for comfort and wisdom, I might indulge myself in vain scribblings.

Come to me, MARA, for without you, I might forget the ways of our fathers, and preening by the light of latest fashion, my words might tremble like the thin reeds of novelty in the tempest of enthusiasms.

Come to me, DIBELLA, for without you, my words must lie dull and leaden without the gilding of grace and sagacity to enchant the reader's ear and eye.

Come to me, ARKAY, for without you, there is neither breath nor beginning, nor can any man live, love, or learn without the spark of your spirit.

Foreword

WHEN THE FIRST EDITION OF THE POCKET GUIDE to the Empire was published, over four hundred years ago, it was to describe and delineate a new nation under the Emperor Tiber Septim. Ancient independent kingdoms had tumbled; the war-weary citizenry were frightened, believing wild rumors and fantastical stories about the people of neighboring provinces: the very notion of a single Tamrielic Empire, the first in nearly a thousand years, was strange and foreboding. The book was intended to inform, educate, and reassure the people of a new empire.

The Guide continued in circulation, being reprinted in its original form for over three hundred years, unchanged while the Empire continued to redefine itself. A vicious civil war between rival cousins for the Imperial throne, a catastrophic insurrection in the west by the Camoran Usurper, a disastrous invasion of Akavir, and endless cycles of revolts and reformations, all went unmentioned in the Guide. At last, recognizing the original's multitudinous anachronisms, a second edition of the Guide was commissioned in the 331st year of the Empire by the Empress Morihatha. The Imperial Geographic Society was once again called upon to update its descriptions, remove most of the propagandistic tone of the original, and to reiterate and modernize the claim that Tamriel was in fact a unified Empire.

Much has changed in the one hundred and twenty one years since the Second Edition, and much has remained the same.

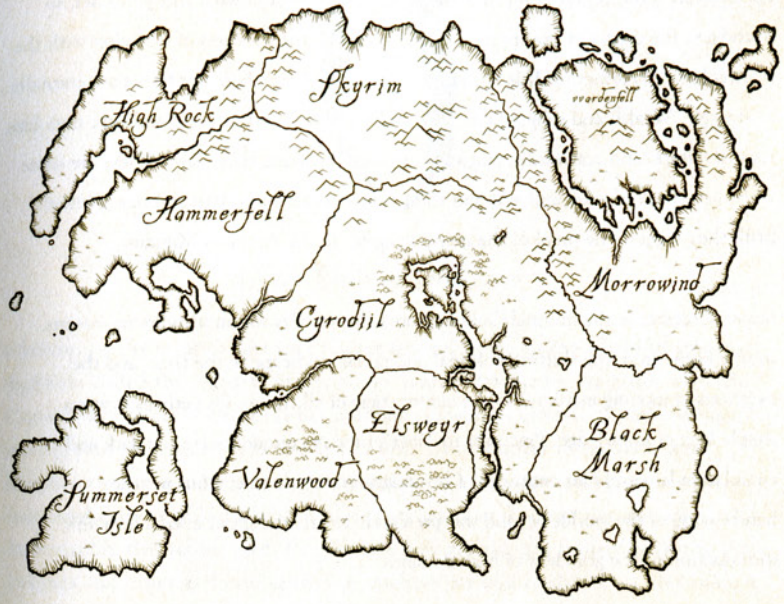
News of change still proceeds by the imperfect machine of gossip throughout the farms, hamlets, and cities of Tamriel. Fact is exaggerated, warped, inverted, and ignored in favor of superstition and old prejudices. Even the literate and well-traveled can believe and spread false information, depending on where they have been and what they have read. The need for a truthful and encyclopedic work is necessary.

If the parochialism of the population has not changed, what has changed is much of the Empire itself. In the west, whole kingdoms have been transformed by the events of the Miracle of Peace, sometimes called the Warp in the West. In the east, the ancient Tribunal has fallen and with it, the governance of the Temple. Wars during the Imperial Simulacrum have further changed the face of the Empire as we know it.

By the order of His Imperial Majesty, Uriel Septim VII, it has once again come upon the Imperial Geographical Society to prepare a new Third Edition of the Pocket Guide to the Empire. Our aim is simply to paint a portrait of our known world at this moment in history for the edification of our readers, who we hope will include every literate creature who calls this place home.

This must be by necessity an enormous painting, wide in scope. We must fall short of describing every blade of grass, and must be content with the knowledge that some day, it will be outdated, and a fourth edition will be necessary.

We begin with the widest and most fundamental of all views: the nature of our own existence.



Arena Supermundus: The Tapestry of Heaven

The aim of the Guide is to describe the Empire of Tamriel as it stands today, but we must at least briefly put it in context, by describing what lies beyond us. As vast as Tamriel is, we are only but one small part of the greater world of Nirn. It is a physical place, but a spiritual one as well, comprising what teachers of mysticism call the Mundus or, more delightfully, the Gray Maybe.

As Cyrodiil is the center point of Tamriel, taking the best of what surrounds her, so Mundus is the center of the spiritual world, blending the darkness of Oblivion with the searing light of Aetherius. It is sometimes called the Arena here, for forces are eternally at struggle. Wealth and subjugation, love and loss, life and death and undeath, inviolate laws of nature, and conversely, magickal means of breaking those laws. There are some who even speak of good and evil, but these concepts are subjective and not spiritual. Still, they suggest one more of the many struggles in the Arena of Mundus.

Imperial scribes of the original Guide ignored this totality for multitudinous reasons, mostly borne from the shifting political and racial landscape of the time, and the exertions of moving mankind to the center stage of all things. Or perhaps it was a simple lack of knowledge. Precursor to Tiber's time of conquest were the dark and cumulative losses of four centuries of Interregnum. In any case, a fair-weather handwaving of the worlds beyond was preferable to an attempt at even a layman's introduction to the grandeur of high domain.

And while the Morihatha Edition tried valiantly to rectify a little of this in its opening pages, it is at the request of the current regime, which has experienced firsthand the peril and wonder of the Supermundus, that its citizenry be gifted with more than a casual glance of the mystic realms beyond our shores.

The Void of Oblivion

Oblivion is the most dangerous of outer realms, home to the powerful spirits of darkness called the Daedra. Everyone on Tamriel has had some brush with the Capricious Powers, whether it be in dream, or war, or at festival. Indeed, simply staring into the night sky is enough to visit Oblivion, for it begins where Mundus ends and surrounds those terminals on every side. Its rulers are the immortal Princes of Void, whose names are many and whose natures are inextricably tied to our own. In the same way mortals are infused with the Nine Divines and other aetherial spirits through virtue and creation, we also share a relationship with the Royalty of our baser vagaries.

Since Oblivion is coterminous with the plane of Nirn, travel there has happened since time immemorial. Because of this, its quarters are the most mapped and charted of all the outer realms, though there is still much more mystery than understanding. While it is easiest to think of a Void being exactly that, Oblivion is anything but, and while it is true that much of it is a black and empty sea, through every era magicians and emperors and villains have all visited its borders and returned with tales of countless isles of wonder and cosmic whimsy. The Daedra Lords, here from the start, have through long eons hoarded so much surplus of existence that they have built not only their own domains, but much more besides.

It is beyond the scope of this pamphlet to describe the Daedra Principalities in any detail. Interested readers are encouraged to seek out the works of Master Zenas of the Mages Guild or the Imperial Geographic Society's own *Census of Daedra Lords*.

The Magic of Aetherius

Imperial Theosophy teaches us that our world was born from magicka, the creative force that informs and sustains all life. The sources of magic are the many and diverse heavens beyond the void, collectively known as the Aetherius.

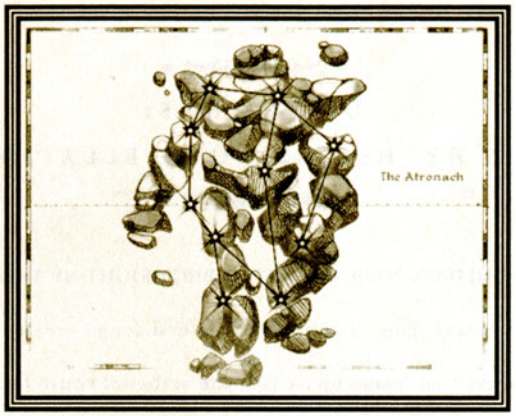
Aetherius, ancestral seat of the Nine Divines and the other original spirits, is the plane of pure magicka. Whereas Oblivion may surround us every night, it is aetherial energy that infuses our daily existence, from highest to lowest, and gives all the races of men, mer, and beast common purpose. Its magic brings the rain to the fields, love to our hearths, and scientific principles to our technological industries. It gives us the very Sun itself. Finally, Aetherius is the home to the Aedra, those cornerstones of the Mundus whose aspects we see in temple, in lordship, and the high walk of heroes.

Visits to Aetherius occur even less frequently than to Oblivion, for the void is a long expanse and only the stars offer portal for aetherial travel, or the judicious use of magic. The expeditions of the Reman Dynasty and the Sun Birds of Alinor are the most famous attempts in our histories, and it is a cosmic irony that both of them were eventually dissolved for the same reason: the untenable expenditures required to reach magic by magicka. Their only legacy is the Royal Imperial Mananauts of the Elder Council and the great Orrery at Firsthold, whose spheres are made up of genuine celestial mineral gathered by travelers during the Merethic Era.

Birthsigns: The Aetherial Constellations

Every child on Nirn is given a birthright by the heavens. Known as star signs, they are fortunes and dooms created by the magical interplay that makes up each of the aetherial constellations. Commonly, these constellations number thirteen, though others have been observed during times of empyrean harmony or stress.

The Apprentice

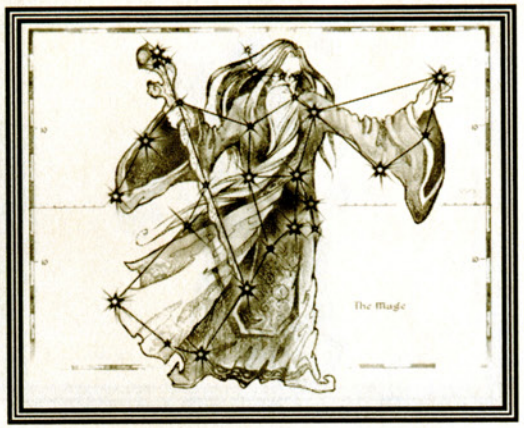


The Atronach

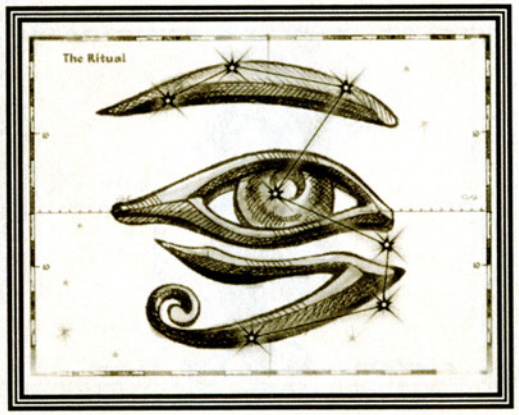
The Lady

The Lord

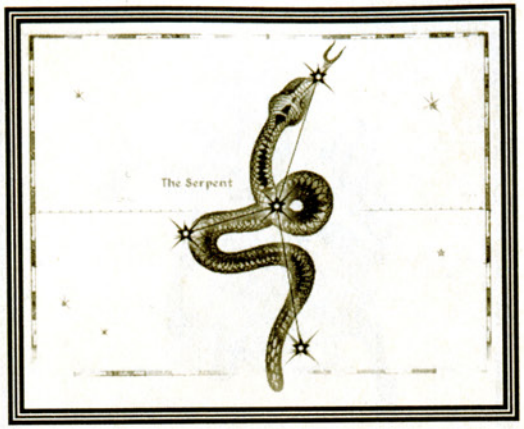
The Lover



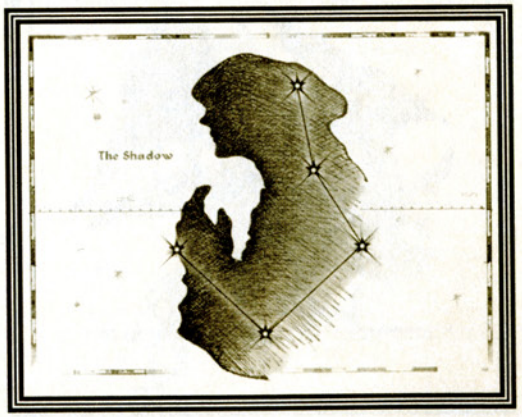
The Mage



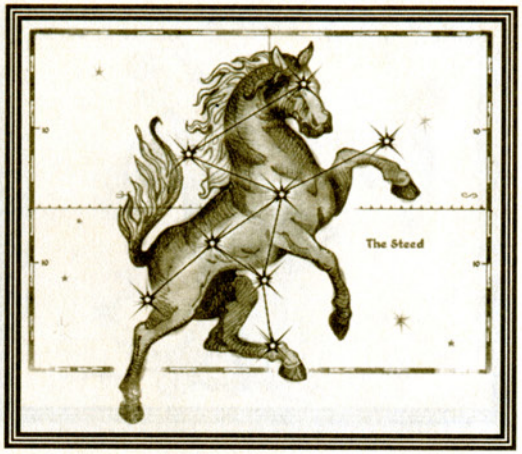
The Ritual



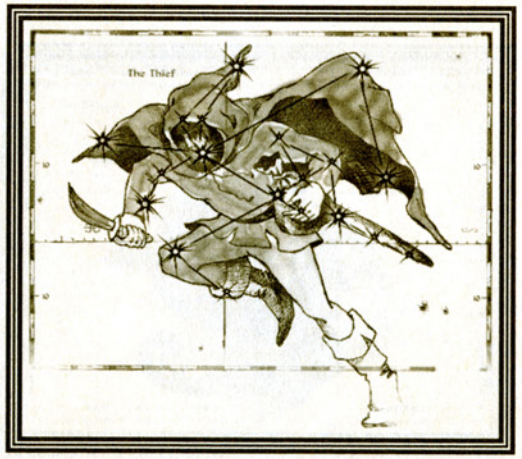
The Serpent



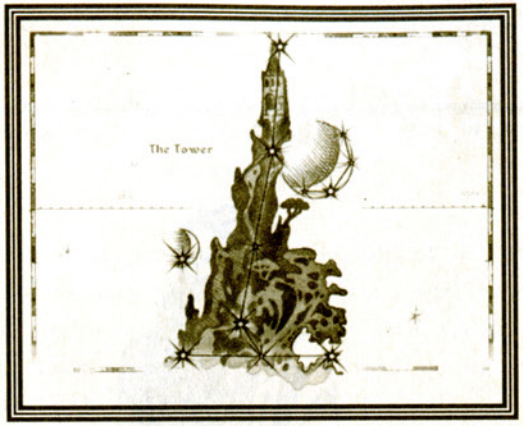
The Shadow



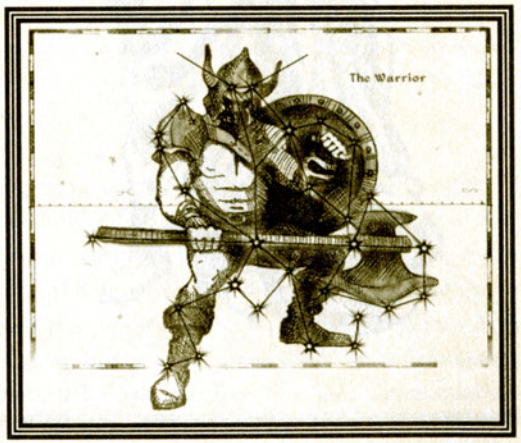
The Steed



The Thief



The Tower



The Warrior

All the Eras of Man, A Comprehensive History of Our History

WHAT FOLLOWS IS ONLY A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF WHAT HAS preceded this time, for those who lack even a basic knowledge of the prehistory and history of Tamriel. Those who find their appetites whetted will no doubt avail themselves of the many fine works of history in the libraries and bookshops of the Empire.

The Elder Wilds

History, of course, begins with creation. Sadly, all the objectivity and solid evidence we require of other events in our records must be dismissed at this early point. Within each province, each culture, each religion, each family there exists a different understanding of how this world came to be. It defines us, this belief in where we came from, and the Imperial Geographic Society prefers to leave that to you, gentle reader.

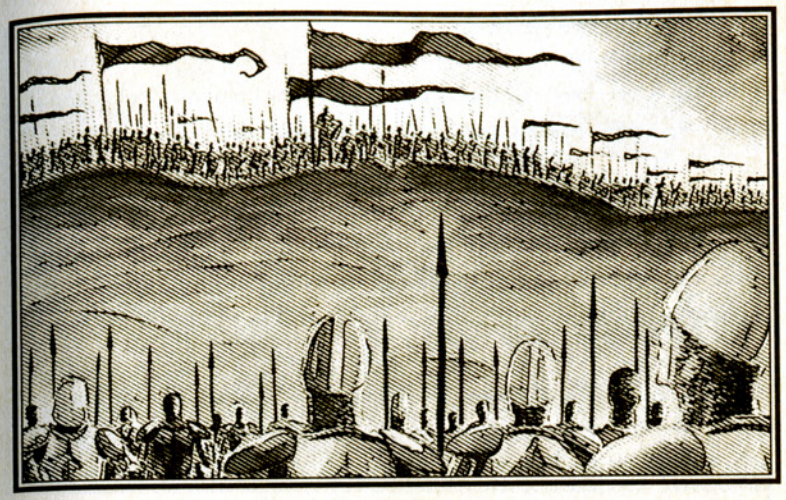
That said, one persistent story that is accepted by many cultures is that as the world congealed into reality, the Gods made a great tower to discuss how best to proceed with the making of Mundus. The physical, temporal, spiritual, and magical elements of Nirn were set at this Convention, and the tower itself remained behind even as some of the Gods disappeared into Aetherius. Today it is the Adamantine Tower on the little island of Balfiera between High Rock and Hammerfell in the Iliac Bay. That such a humanoid structure remains the sole footprint of the Aedra speaks perhaps of the essentially mortal nature of our world.

It is generally understood that neither the proto-elves, or Aldmer, nor the proto-men, or Nedics, lived in Tamriel during the earliest years of creation. The Hist trees of Black Marsh, most say, were the original life forms on our continent, followed by the progenitors of the modern Khajiit, the modern Argonian, the modern Sload, the modern Dreugh, and other "beast folk," some now gone from our land, some so shy or rare that their presence is seldom detected.

In what historians called the Merethic (or Mythic) Era, the years before formal historical reckoning, the Aldmer came to Tamriel from a legendary mysterious land called Old Ehlnofey or Aldmeris. They settled in Summerset Isle, and then began to spread out eastward. The Nedic people meanwhile came from the frozen land of Atmora to the north to what is today Skyrim. Where elves and men met, inevitably, there was hostility.

The Aldmer changed over time culturally according to their new environments, being at first temperamentally and then physically very distinct "races" separate from one another. The ones who stayed in Summerset became known as the Altmer; in Valenwood, Bosmer; in Morrowind, Chimer and Dwemer; in Cyrodiil, Ayleid; and in High Rock, a mix between Nedic and Aldmer birthed the Bretons. The Orsimer or Orcs were also created at this time: Aldmer warped by the destruction of their leader Trinimac, who it is said became the Daedra Prince Malacath. This disparate chorus may have been crafted consciously by the Daedra or by the shifts of the earthbones, but the reason why is not necessary for this history. Change they did.

The Nedic people also changed over the centuries of their invasions from Atmora. The original Nedics of Skyrim are now known as the Nords. The ones who crossed west to High Rock, as we have said, interbred with the Aldmer there to create the Bretons, who are most commonly considered men, not mer. The Nedics who crossed south became the Cyrodiils, eventually the prisoners and slaves of the bellicose Ayleids of that region.



The First Era

We begin counting time forward at the founding of the Camoran Dynasty in Valenwood. It is perhaps an arbitrary starting date, but the Dynasty (discussed in the section on Valenwood below) and King Eplear himself were visionaries of the civilizations to come. In the center of Tamriel, the Ayleids were creating an empire of their own with Cyrodilic slaves; while to the north, the Nords began to unite into a common whole that was to be called Skyrim.

The Nordic influence on their southern cousins was equally dramatic, inspiring the Cyrodiils to revolt against their Ayleid masters, under the banner of Alessia, former slave turned queen. The Alessian Empire of Cyrodiil was born in 1E 243. The expansionist Nords also harried the kingdoms of the Dwemer and Chimer in Resdayn, which is today called Morrowind. Eventually, in response, the embattled clans formed their own alliance with the Dwemer king Dumac and the Chimer king Nerevar ruling jointly in 1E 416.

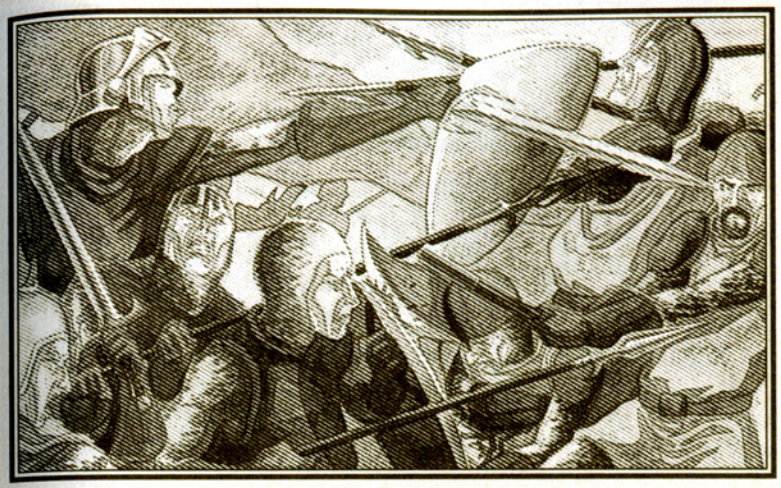
In a few hundred years, however, the alliance between Dwemer and Chimer disintegrated into bloody battle, the War of the First Council. The aftermath of the war is legendary: the Dwemer were vanquished into extinction, and the Chimer were transformed into the red-eyed dark-skinned Dunmer.

Together with the Nords, the Alessians turned their eyes west towards the fertile land of High Rock, ruled by the hated elves. For much of the First Era, the west was disputed land, until the Bretons rose as the empires, too extended, fell back.

The Ra Gada, or "Warrior Wave," from Yokuda arrived in Volenfell to the west in 1E 808, conquering the land and renaming it Hammerfell. Once settled, the Ra Gada, or Redguards, joined with the Breton kingdoms in destroying an empire in its infancy, the Orcish homeland of Orsinium.

As the various Tamrielic cultures battled one another, there were threats beyond its shores. The Thrassian Plague from the Sloads washed over the land, decimating the population from coast to coast. The Tsaesci of Akavir preferred a more straightforward attack, invading Tamriel in 1E 2703, only to be defeated by the Cyrodilic emperor Reman I.

The death of the Emperor Reman III in 1E 2920 left the Cyrodilic Empire with no heirs. The reigns of power were ably taken up by Reman's Akaviri chancellor, whose ancestors had entered the Imperial service after their defeat by Reman I. Thus began the line of Akaviri Potentates at the opening of the Second Era, who continued to rule the Cyrodilic Empire until its demise more than four centuries later.



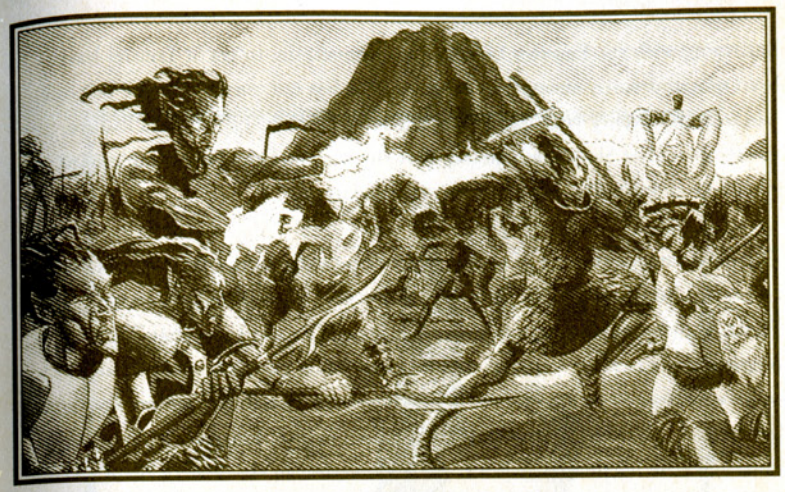
The Second Era

The Cyrodilic Empire continued to be a force of great power for the first four hundred and thirty years under the rule of the Akaviri Potentates. Though alien to our culture, they established some of the great traditions of our land, granting charters to organizations such as the Mages and Fighters Guilds. Another sign of peace and prosperity occurred in the year 2E 309, when Elsweyr was created by the union of two Khajiit tribelands, Anequina and Pellitine.

When the last Potentate, Savirien-Chorak, was assassinated in 2E 430, leaving no heirs, the great Empire was finally destroyed. Black Marsh forcibly split from the lands of men, as the Knahaten Plague made the land uninhabitable by all but the Argonians themselves. Akavir once again invaded Tamriel, barely rebuffed after attacking Morrowind in 2E 572. From one end of the continent to the other, war and rebellion struck at the heart of every great tradition of the land.

The first sign of reunification occurred in the west. The Altmer of Summerset, long concerned with their own wars with other island kingdoms, allied with Valenwood to form the Aldmeri Dominion for their common good. Still greater, however, was the force that rose from the ancient seat of emperors, Cyrodiil. A great general, Talos, liegeless after his lord's assassination, began his career as the greatest conqueror in the history of the land.

Better known by his Cyrodilic name, Tiber Septim and his armies conquered all of Tamriel, creating the Empire that bears his name even today, and ushering in the Third Era.



The Third Era

For thirty-eight years, the Emperor Tiber Septim reigned, bequeathing the throne of Tamriel to his grandson Pelagius on his deathbed. The Septim family, occasionally inclusive of adopted and married members, has ruled ever since.

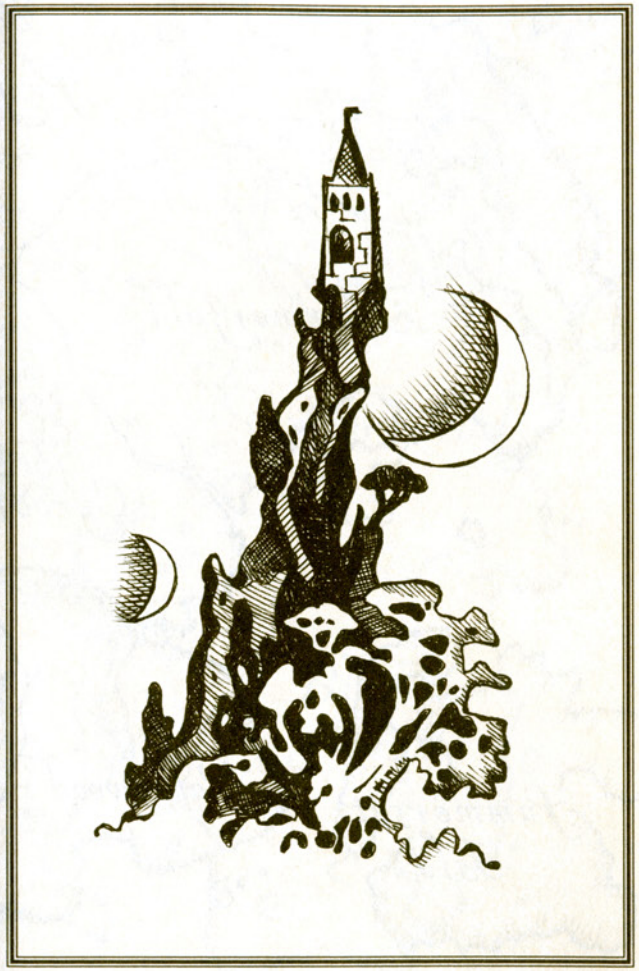
Within a few generations, however, the family had begun to develop rivalries and jealousies which exploded into a civil war in the year 3E 120. The War of the Red Diamond ended with the death of Uriel III and his mother Queen Potema of Solitude, but its reverberations may still be felt today. The unity of Empire was never again to be assumed.

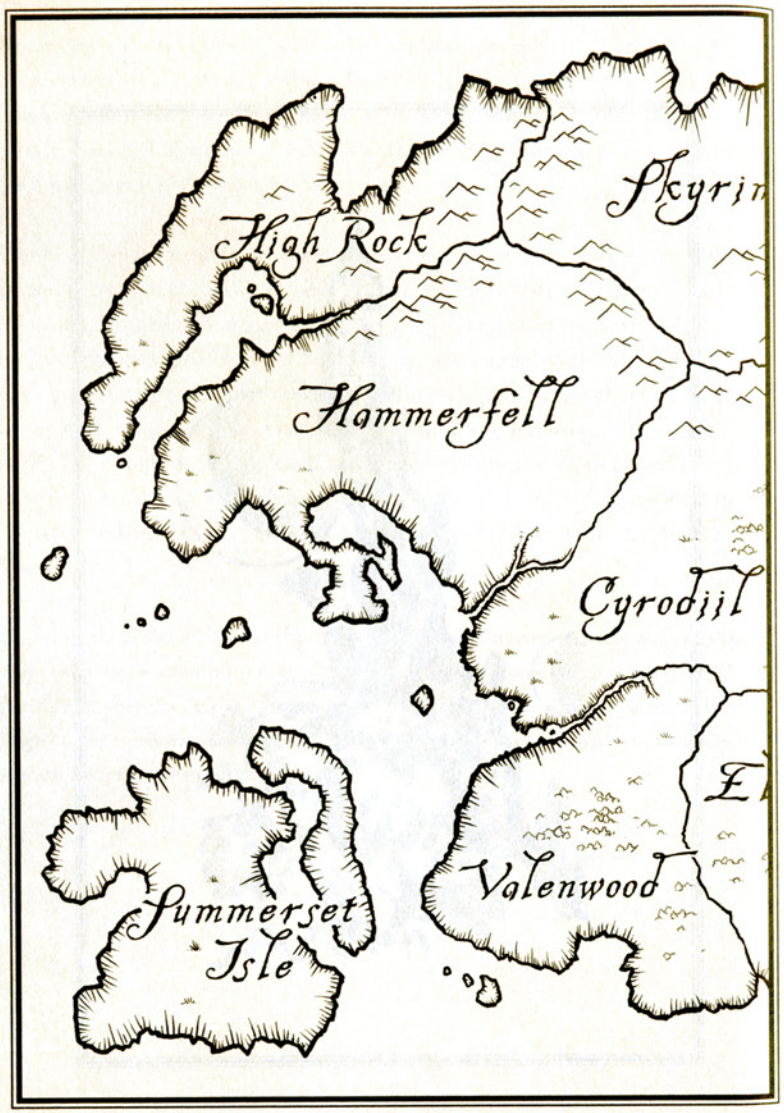
The Emperors who followed, such as the Sheogorath-kissed Pelagius III, yielded to the authority of the Elder Council to keep some semblance of order in the land. It was only too evident what occurred when the Empire was without a strong leader. In the most horrible example, the people of Valenwood, the Colovian West, and Hammerfell suffered under the depredations of the Camoran Usurper, who ravaged their land with undead and Daedric hordes for nearly twenty years before his defeat in 3E 267.

Beginning with the Empress Morihatha, however, the rulers of Tamriel have been extraordinarily strong and capable. This has not meant that the last one hundred and twenty years have been the most peaceful in Tamriel's history, utterly devoid of bloodshed, merely that the wars and troubles of our recent past are a pale imitation of what has occurred before.

The most famous trouble of recent years came early in the reign of our current emperor, Uriel Septim VII. By wile and sorcery, his trusted battlemage Jagar Tharn imprisoned and impersonated his liege. The ten years that Tharn reigned, the so-called Imperial Simulacrum, was a time when old troubles resurfaced, forgotten grudges rekindled, and wars flared throughout the land. In the east, Morrowind attacked Black Marsh in the Arnesian War; in the north, Skyrim battled High Rock and Hammerfell in the War of Bend'r-Mahk; in the south, Elsweyr took arms against Valenwood in the Five Year War; in the west, Valenwood also lost land to its old ally Summerset in the War of the Blue Divide.

Yet all of these troubles, and the even more recent bizarre circumstances in the Iliac Bay and Morrowind, paint only a picture with blood. In the year 3E 432, the year of this Guide's publication, the Empire stands strong and united. In the chapters that follow, a more detailed portrait of the history and current events of each Province is presented.



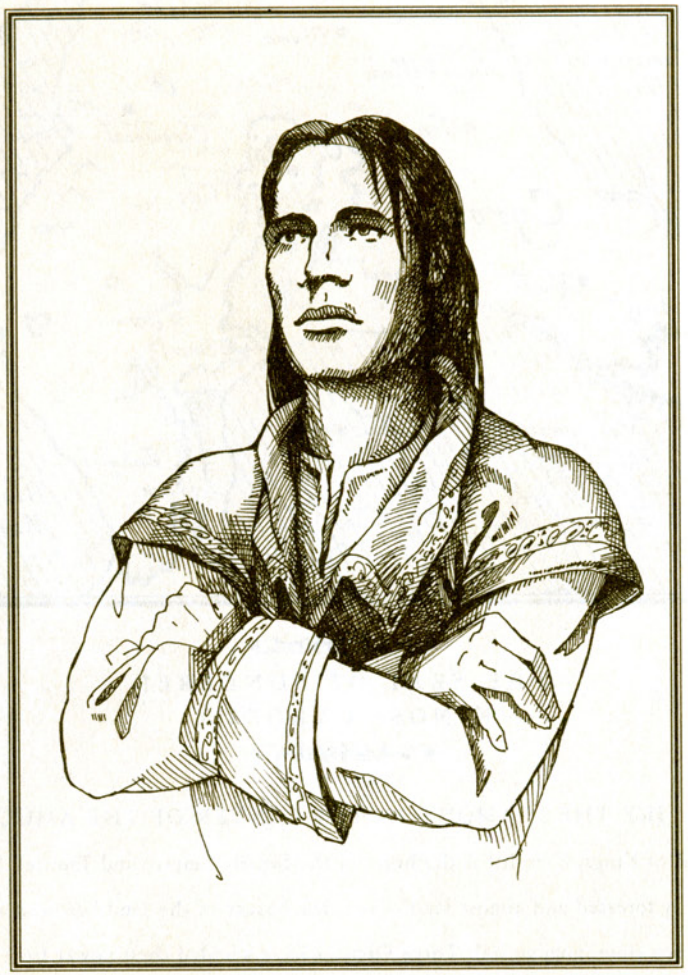


THE EMPIRE OF TAMRIEL

3E 432

THE SEAT OF SUNDERED KINGS: CYRODIIL

LIKE THE DIAMOND IN THE CENTER OF THE AMULET of Kings, Cyrodiil is the heart of the Septim Empire and Tamriel. Still largely forested and almost landlocked, the beauty of the land has been sung of since time immemorial. Three Empires have wielded their power from the strategic center of the continent, so it is little wonder that Cyrodiil is widely known simply as The Imperial Province.



The early Aldmeri settlers to Tamriel established strongholds on the islands of Summerset and along the coast, but did not venture far inland. Only oral histories and the fragmented ballad of Topal the Pilot offer glimpses of the ancient beast races that inhabited the land, but they are shadowy, mist-drawn portraits of time before reckoning. It is not until the coming of the Ayleid that Cyrodilic history truly begins.

The Ayleids were ancient Aldmer, cousins of all the elven races that exist to this day. Over time, they became a distinct people, crafting a civilization whose ruins still puzzle and fascinate modern archeologists and adventurers. The ancient Nedic people, spreading south from Skyrim, became the slave labor for their ambitions, centered around the White Gold Tower.

The slave rebellion of Alessia in the 242nd year of the First Era is a seminal event in the history of Cyrodiil, and all of Tamriel. While humans and elves had been battling in Skyrim for some time, and the Slave Queen's revolt could not be called the first victory of men over mer, it represents a turning point in the continental power structure. The heart of Tamriel was going to belong to these former slaves, present day Cyrodilics or Imperials, forever more.

With the aid of the Nords of Skyrim, the Cyrodilics consolidated their power, forming a loose alliance between the two sometimes disparate regions: the rich Nibenay Valley, and the remote, rough Colovian Highlands. While the Alessian Empire continued to push westward towards the Direnni lands in High Rock, the greatest change was a cultural and religious one. The prophet Marukh's teachings both brought identity to Cyrodiil, codifying the pantheon most civilized Tamriellians worship to this day, and brought conflict due to the more severe strictures he espoused.

The next great transformation of the land came from distinctly external forces. The foiled Akaviri invasion of 2703 brought about a new dynasty, and a new spirit of cooperation among independent nations, dedicated to fighting the common threat. Under the Emperor Reman I, Cyrodiil became truly cosmopolitan, incorporating aspects of High Rock, Colovia, Nibenay, and the sophisticated if strange culture of the defeated Akaviri into a common whole. The Cyrodilic Empire, also called the Second Empire, began again the process of expansion, founding a strong single nation, if not actually succeeding in conquering the entire continent.

The assassination of Reman III and his son and heir Juilek at the end of the Four Score War with Morrowind marked the end of an era, if not the end of the Second Empire. Under the Akaviri Potentates, the system of governing continued to evolve throughout the Second Era, progress that abruptly ended with the assassination of the last Potentate in the year 2E 430.

The rest of the Second Era was a time of great darkness and chaos throughout Tamriel, nowhere moreso than in Cyrodiil. Without a central government, Nibenay and Colovia split apart, farms fell fallow, villages were left in ruin, and the former Imperial highways became no man's land, the realm of bandit kings. The Imperial City itself became the prize for an endless series of would-be emperors, fought over for centuries until its glory was only a faded shadow of the great days when it ruled Tamriel.

The rise of Tiber Septim has been amply documented in the history, and in a hundred books besides. In Cyrodiil, his influence could not be overemphasized. He gave the land back its traditional power and more, and became the symbol of it. He founded the dynasty that reigns to this very day. Cyrodiil, of course, helped Tiber Septim as much as he helped it. It gave legitimacy and a sense of history to his legend, which grew even ahead of his conquests.

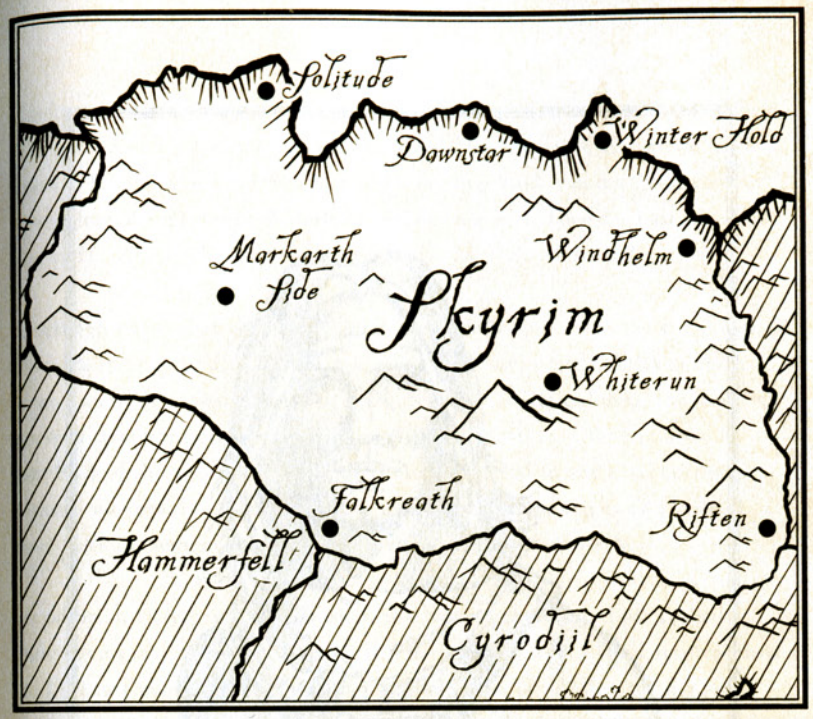
The Imperial City and Cyrodiil rose again in splendor, occasionally tarnished by the weakness of some of Septim's descendants, the War of the Red Diamond, and the Imperial Simulacrum, but never again did it lose its luster.

Current Events

The Imperial Province has continued to be the stable heart of the Empire, offering a model to its satellites of a government that settles disputes by diplomacy, not force of arms. The recent marriage of Lady Alessia, daughter of the Countess of Chorrol, to Count Marius Caro of Leyawiin typifies this, a perfect blend of love and sound political judgement.

Nevertheless, there have been a few frightening moments in Cyrodiil in recent years. A suspected outbreak of the Knahaten Plague, a threat for the first time in hundreds of years, sparked panic along the southern border with Black Marsh. It was revealed to be a hoax, perhaps created by Argonians fighting back against Imperial excursions led by the Blackwood Company, and the fear was dissipated. Family strife in Kvatch claimed the lives of both sons of Count Haderus Goldwine, vying for the inheritance. While peace has been restored, the Count, at the time of this writing, is still in mourning, and has not designated a new heir.

In the Imperial Court, there is thankfully no such tragedy. While the Emperor chose not to remarry following the Empress's death more than fifty years ago, she left to him three healthy boys, who have spent their adult years learning the art of politics from their masterful liege and father. Crown Prince Geldall has already taken many of Uriel's responsibilities, and has impressed one and all with his acumen. As the heart of the Empire is solid, all of Tamriel is strong.



THE THROAT OF THE WORLD: SKYRIM

SKYRIM IS THE NORTHERN PROVINCE OF TAMRIEL, a land of breathtaking beauty and lethal winters. It is one of the ancient seats of power in the Empire and well-populated by the Nords. As if to compensate for their freezing environment, the Nords are famously hot-blooded, and the political climate can be as shifting and as dangerous as the winds.

Looking at virtually any vista in Skyrim, one is looking at the remains of a battlefield. The great Aedric cataclysms that brought Tamriel into existence in primeval times seem to have spent most of their fury in this northern land. Vast majestic mountain ranges form the spiny twisted backbone of the province, and one can hear echoes of the early Nedic people's battle cries whistling in the winds of the valleys.

Tradition has it that the first humans came to Tamriel from the continent of Atmora in ancient days. It was not a single invasion but a series of them over hundreds of years, creating many different Nedic cultures, the new-arrived Atmorans always clashing with the generations that had already established themselves. The region around Saarthal in the high northern coastal mountains exchanged hands many time, becoming more powerful and more permanent, like the Nords themselves, by adversity.

In addition to fighting one another, the Nedic people faced off against a new enemy, the Aldmer. The struggles between the two — prototypical men and prototypical elves — continues in some form or another to this very day, as the Nedic people became the Nords, Imperials, and Bretons, and the Aldmer became the Ayleid, Altmer, Dwemer, Chimer, Dunmer, and Bosmer. Out of this time also rose one of the most legendary of all Tamrielic figures, Ysgramor, from whom all Nordic kings are descended.

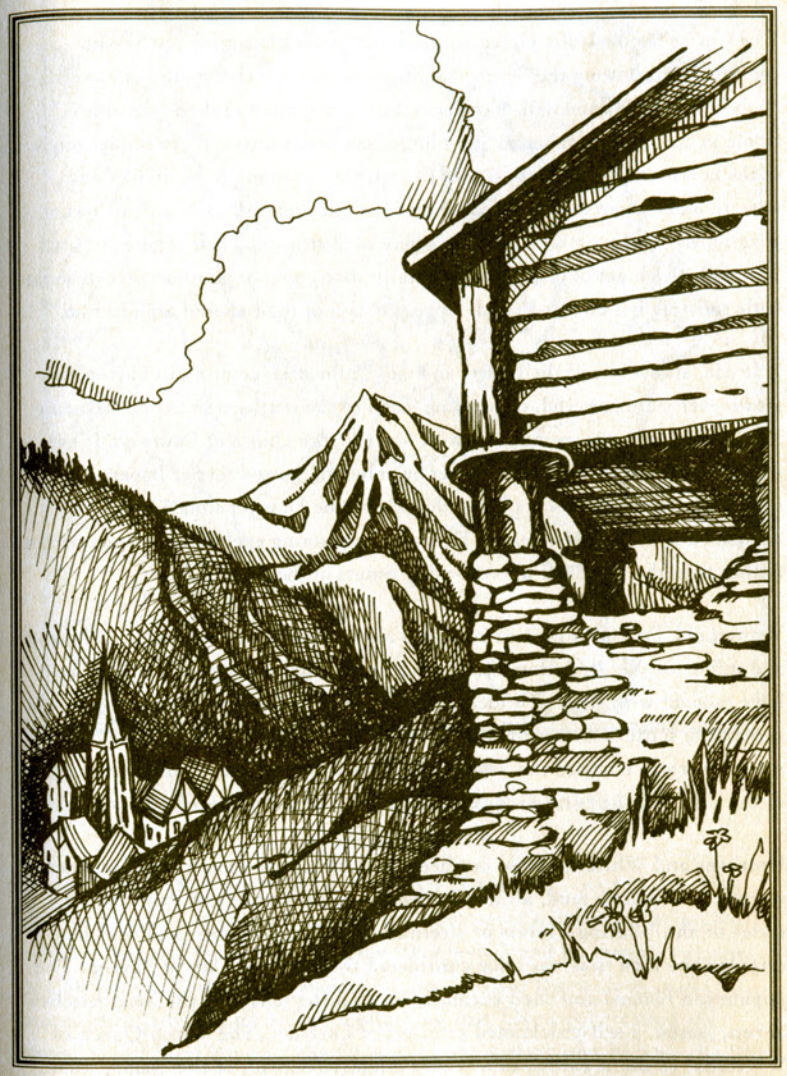
Spreading out from the north, Ysgramor's clan stretched its arms, proving that no ancient force was more fearsome than the Nords. In the 113th year of the First Era, the entirety of modern Skyrim was under the reign of King Harald, and still, it continued to expand. Leaving their snowy valleys and mountains, the Nords attacked the Dwemer of neighboring Resdayn, the Altmer and Bretons of High Rock, and lent aid to the rising slave rebellion in Cyrodiil, which was to end the Ayleid rule of the south.

In the centuries that followed, Skyrim expanded and contracted as battles were won and lost. Though Cyrodiil was considered a separate domain, the Nords and the early Imperials formed a loose alliance against their elven opponents, their cultures mixing together, creating the foundations of modern day Aedric worship. Yet Skyrim remained the dominant human nation in Tamriel until it was torn apart by rivalries within the Ysgramor clan. As individual chieftains fought each other, Skyrim gradually lost her holdings in present day Morrowind and High Rock, and certain localities in Skyrim became independent kingdoms.

For brief periods, one ruler has managed to unite all of Skyrim, but the Nord character is one essentially of conflict, and the confederacies never last. The Cyrodilic Empire and later the Septim Empire was able to take advantage of this tendency and recruit the warlike Nords to their side before they became a force of the opposition.

In the third era, if Cyrodiil has been the heart of the Empire, Skyrim has been its strong arm. The greatest threat to the Empire's unity occurred in the 120th year, when the so-called Wolf Queen of Solitude, Potema, aunt of the Empress Kintyra, launched a rebellion that became a bloody civil war. Though it was eventually quelled, the repercussions are evident to this day. There is a strong underground movement called the Hörme that believes Potema and her deposed son Uriel III to be the last of Tiber Septim's true blood and under that principle lead raids against Imperial interests in the province.

Under the Imperial Simulacrum of Jagar Tharn, cold animosities between the kingdoms of Skyrim and their neighbors in High Rock and Hammerfell were fanned into the fire of war. Upon our true Emperor's return to his throne, this war ended, but not before Skyrim had reasserted itself on territory it had not held since the 1st Era.



The War of Bend'r-Mahk increased the territory that is considered Skyrim considerably, allowing the Nordic counts to swallow up many miles of eastern High Rock and Hammerfell. Resistance by the Bretons and the Redguards is feeble in the cities of Jehenna and Elinhir, and more active in the border zones of the countryside. The city-state of Dragonstar continues to be divided into western and eastern sections, walled off from one another, each with its own government, and each with an atmosphere of mistrust and fear. There are few days without an act of terror from one resistance group or another, though so far little territory has changed hands since the days of the Imperial Simulacrum.

Solitude, always one of the richest and most influential counties in Skyrim, has grown ever more powerful, controlling much of the northern coastline following King Thian's alliance by marriage with Macalla, the Queen of Dawnstar. It has sought to expand its influence further by annexing several former Imperial fiefs, such as the island of Roscrea, ruled directly by the Emperor since Uriel V conquered it in the 271st year. It has begun sponsoring exploratory missions even farther from the mainland into the misty waters of the Sea of Ghosts.

Winterhold, Solitude's ancient rival, has also experienced a renaissance of power and influence. Refugees from Morrowind, far from burdening the eastern city, have brought with them new ideas, enriching her culture and stimulating its old mercantile spirit. Scholars from all over Tamriel have descended on the county since it became home to the Ysmir Collective, a library rescued from destruction in the east, and the cornerstone of academic life at the College of Winterhold.

Hrothgar and Whiterun have not been as fortunate as their coastal northern cousins. A dynastic feud, attacks by Hörme bandits and frost trolls, and a series of annihilating winters of alternating floods, droughts, and fires has crippled the area that was once considered the Imperial City of Skyrim. The population blamed and then curiously exalted the leader of the local witches' coven, Jsashe, a self-proclaimed priestess of Lorkhan. The Witch-Queen of Whiterun, as she is called, now wields effective control of the county, though her magic has not brought prosperity as of yet.

THE TEMPLE: MORROWIND

LOCATED IN THE NORTH-EAST OF TAMRIEL, MUCH OF THE landscape is as twisted and mountainous as its neighbor Skyrim, but it is a hot, desolate land, even far from Vvardenfell and its famous volcano, Red Mountain. Previously named Resdayn, Veloth, Dwemereth, and Dunmereth, it was home to the mysterious, lost Elven tribe called the Dwemer, and their cousins, the Chimer of Summerset who became the Dark Elves of today. For the last two Eras, it has been called Morrowind.

History

The earliest civilization of which there are records is that of the Dwemer. Sometimes called "Dwarves" by the ignorant, the Dwemer were the remnants of the early Aldmer who had settled the coasts, and developed a highly sophisticated and technological culture.

The rule of the Dwemer in Morrowind was contested by another group of Mer, the Chimer. The Chimer were, like the Dwemer, descendents of the Aldmer, and had followed their prophet Veloth across Tamriel from the west. Soon, they abandoned nomadic life and divided themselves into what were known as the Great Houses, tight-knit political clans that survive in Morrowind to this day.

Disputes over territory marked the early interactions between the two groups of Mer. These battles were fueled by the conflicting religious beliefs of the two cultures. While the Dwemer were an agnostic people, preferring reason to faith, the Chimer were staunch Daedra-worshippers, and considered the Dwemer's lack of belief an affront to their gods.

It was not until Nordic invasions of the First Era that the two groups of Mer were able to achieve a peace. An alliance led by Nerevar of the Chimer and Dumac of the Dwemer was successful in routing the Nords from the land, and creating the First Coucil.

Ultimately, though, the cultural differences between the two groups were too great to allow for a lasting peace. The War of the First Council culminated at the Dwemer fortress of Red Mountain, although accounts of the final hours of the war are varied.

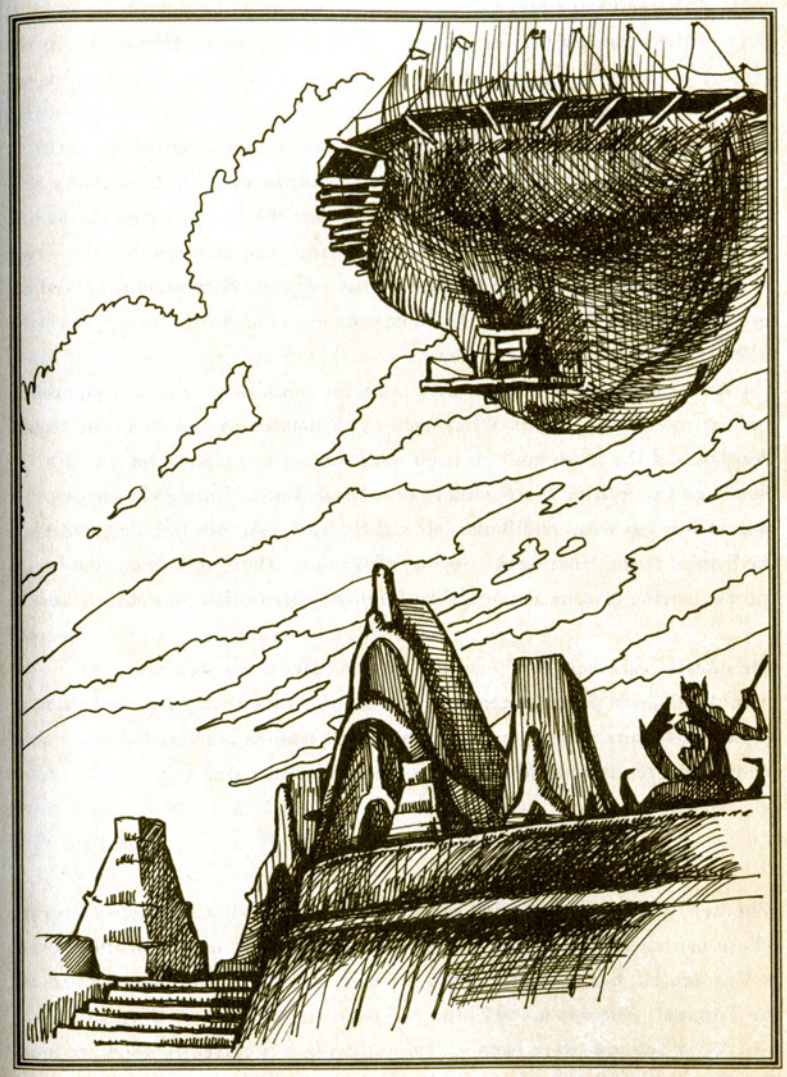
It is known that Nerevar was slain during or shortly after the battle, although by whom remains a point of much contention. Dumac and all of his Dwemeri brethren were killed, but the exact manner of their extinction is still debated. Nor did the Chimer leave the battle of Red Mountain unchanged: their skins were turned to grey and their eyes fire-red. They would henceforth be known as the Dunmer of Morrowind.

Perhaps the most important consequences of the battle were the changes effected in Nerevar's closest advisors. His trusted Tribunal – Almalexia, Sotha Sil, and Vivec – were found to have attained great, even god-like, power. His general, Dagoth Ur, originally thought killed at Red Mountain, was later found to have attained a similar degree of power. These four former mortal individuals were to become seen as symbols, champions, gods, and villains, sometimes revered and sometimes despised. The four, until recent years, exercised great influence over the development of the nation of Morrowind.

While most of the local governance of the province continued through the Great Houses, the Tribunal ruled the land indirectly through their Temple, and inspired the Dunmer with their status as Living Gods. The Daedra worship that the Chimer espoused was considered nothing more than a prelude to the new spiritual awakening of the land. Their powers were tested as they joined with the Reman Dynasty to defend the land from the Akaviri.

Though victorious, Morrowind's relationship with the Cyrodilic Empire did not remain cordial, and after steadily growing mistrust, The Four Score War erupted in the 2840th year of the First Era. The Tribunal, and Vivec in particular, demonstrated enormous power and leadership in battle after battle, yet neither side advanced for almost eighty years. In the end, it was the diplomatic skills of the Three that ended the war. Whatever the extent of the Tribunal's power, and how much fancy has been woven into their legend, there can be no doubt of their diplomatic prowess. While other provinces flailed in the chaos of the Second Era, the Tribunal kept the disparate Houses of Morrowind in check, and repelled yet another invasion from Akavir.

The Tribunal's diplomatic skills were put to the test yet again at the end of the Second Era, when they were faced with the external threat of Tiber Septim's rising Empire, as well as the internal threat posed when Dagoth Ur, after long slumbering, arose to take back his fortress of Red Mountain. Septim, not eager to fight three Living Gods and also worried about Dagoth



Ur's return, agreed to a treaty, as described in the history section of this book. The treaty gave Morrowind autonomy and gave the Septim Empire the means to conquer the rest of Tamriel: an equitable solution for both parties involved.

A further concession was given to Septim's demand for a central authority in Morrowind: a ruler who could be his hand in the domain. Barenziah, daughter of the ruling family of Mournhold, was the first to be given the title of Queen of Morrowind. The title was largely ceremonial, but the young Queen and her consort, Tiber Septim's general Symmachus, proved to be extremely popular with the Dunmer people.

The Arnesian War was one of many during the troubled time of the Imperial Simulacrum of Jagar Tharn. What started as a simple slave revolt in the House Dres lands of the south built on itself until the swampy plains erupted with blood and fire, pitting Morrowind against Black Marsh. During the chaos, Symmachus was slain, and Barenziah, rightly fearing for her life, fled across the Empire to the High Rock kingdom of Wayrest. The Queen abdicated her throne, leaving it to her uncle Athyn Llethan, a House Hlaalu noble.

The uneasy truce between Temple, King, and House was beginning to crumble. Dagoth Ur was ascending, the Tribunal was collapsing, and then, according to current popular rumor, a miracle occurred. Indoril Nerevar was reborn, and returned to Morrowind to set things to right.

Current Events

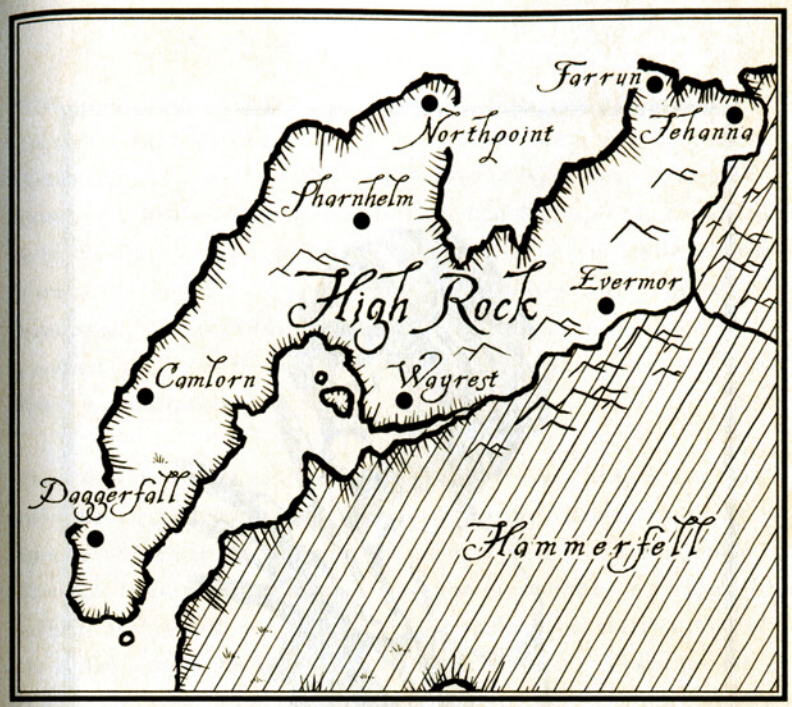
Whether the mysterious figure who arrived in Morrowind was truly Nerevar reborn cannot be known, but the repercussions of that arrival on the shores of Vvardenfell may not yet be fully realized. Dagoth Ur and two members of the Tribunal, Almalexia and Sotha Sil, were destroyed in the Nerevarine's fury. Vivec too may have been killed, but his fate is currently undetermined. The Nerevarine likewise has vanished.

During this time, another legendary figure, Queen Barenziah, also returned to Morrowind. The sudden death of King Llethan, and the subsequent coronation of Barenziah's son Helseth, was the source of much discussion, but as one Nord diplomat famously put it, "The new king is manipulative, ruthless, and calculating. He is exactly what Morrowind needs."

The young king has been somewhat of an enigma, both to outside observers and to his own subjects. One of Helseth's first edicts as King seemed particularly designed to dismantle the traditional power structures of the Dunmer. In accordance with the longstanding wishes of the Empire, he outlawed slavery throughout Morrowind. The reaction to this was bloody, as could be predicted, though the alliances formed were far from expected. As Helseth himself put it in a speech to his people, "If there is to be a revolution, it is best done by a King."

Actions such as this have led many to label King Helseth as the latest in the lineage of Imperial figureheads, though some of his other actions would cast doubt on this pronouncement. Helseth's reformation of the Grand Council, which includes the heads of all the Great Houses, was seen by some as a return to more traditional Dunmer ways.

The Great Houses themselves, long stagnant, are adjusting to the new powers in the land. Some, like Dres and Hlaalu, appear to be on the rise, embracing the new traditions while welcoming the return of the old. Others, like Indoril and Redoran, seem to be waning, unable to change with the times.



The Sons and Daughter of the Direnni West: High Rock

HIGH ROCK, THE WESTERNMOST PROVINCE ON THE mainland of Tamriel, is a land of temperate climates and soft rolling hills, split in half by the towering Wrothgarian Mountains. The quaint charm of its hamlets and austere grandeur of its cities speak of a gentle life, something that was only a distant dream for most of the long, peculiar history of the Bretons.

With its fertile soils and generally clement weather, it is little wonder that the region that is now known as High Rock has attracted many cultures throughout its history. The Gods were the first of these. The Adamantine Tower, in a little island in the middle of the Iliac Bay, is widely considered to be the oldest structure in Tamriel. If the ancient tales are to be believed, it was crafted in the Dawn Era by the Gods themselves to have a place for meeting and deciding what would be the fate of Nirn. Perhaps this is merely a myth, but it is true that when the earliest Aldmer came to the region, the Tower was already standing.

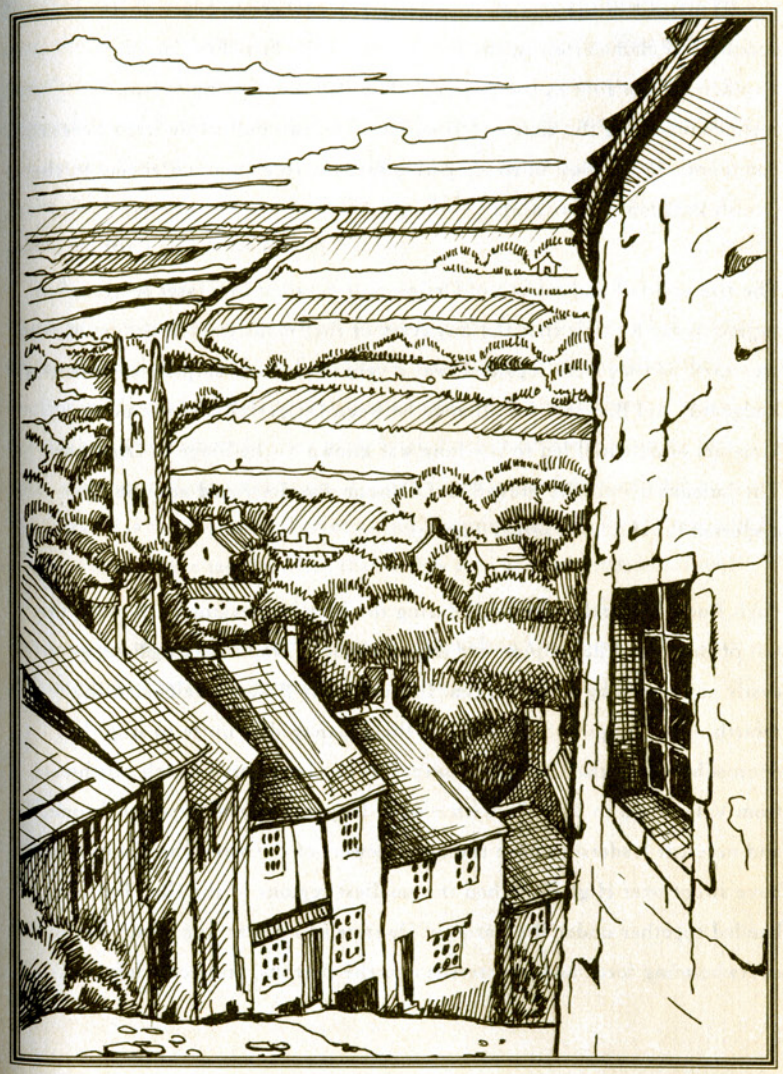
There is evidence that early beast men of one variety or another may have been the original inhabitants of High Rock, but the Aldmer coming from Summerset Isle were the first to settle and form permanent communities. The early Nedic people who arrived next were stumbling upon a highly sophisticated culture, and were quickly overwhelmed and absorbed. One of the earliest tales of Khosey describes a Nord raiding party attacking a group of what they presumed to be Aldmer, but who were, on closer inspection, a mongrel race between elf and human, the remnants of the earlier lost Nedic tribe. They were somewhat awkwardly called "Manmeri," but we know them today as Bretons.

It took many centuries for the Bretons to become the dominant force in High Rock. For most of the First Era, the elves kept their hold on the land, with the Nords founding fortified towns along the coasts to support their pillaging parties, such as Daggerfall, which as a kingdom would have a profound influence on High Rock in years to come.

Of all the families of Aldmer who colonized High Rock, none did it so successfully as the Clan Direnni. So dominant were they that by the middle of the First Era, the whole of High Rock was commonly called "The Direnni Hegemony." As an economic and military power, they were formidable enough to pose a continued threat to the battle-hardened Nords and the nascent Alessian Empire of Cyrodiil. Taking advantage of the internal strife in Skyrim, the Hegemony began taking land north and south of High Rock, claiming portions of Skyrim and present day Hammerfell. At the peak of their power, they controlled nearly a quarter of Tamriel. But they had overextended their reach, and slowly, year by year, they lost all that they had gained, falling back to their fortress in Balfiera, the Adamantine Tower, now called the Direnni Tower.

The Bretons were operating beneath the eyes of history, and their rise in High Rock was through commerce and the foundation of small villages in well-chosen positions, such as the sleepy fishing hamlet of Wayrest on the coast between the Bjoulsae River and the Iliac Bay. Daggerfall, Camlorn, Reich Gradkeep, and many other Nordic cities became Breton not by any act of war, but simply by being assimilated by them. By the end of the First Era, High Rock was the land of the Bretons, and would be so ever after.

But High Rock was never a single cohesive Breton nation. The power vacuum left by the decline of the Direnni fractured High Rock into a hundred fiefdoms of small, walled city-states. This has often left the Bretons at the mercy of the larger powers of Tamriel, but has also made High Rock surprisingly resilient during the times of chaos following the fall of the great empires.



Scarcely had the rule of the Direnni passed into history before two new powers arrived in the region. The Redguards of Yokuda began their conquest of Hammerfell in the 808th year of the First Era, largely displacing beast folk in their attacks, but also supplanting Breton settlements along the southern Iliac Bay. The two cultures warred over dominance in the Bay, until they were faced with a common enemy in the Orcish kingdom of Orsinium.

The rise and fall and rebirth of Orsinium is detailed in a later section, but suffice to say for now that the discovery of the "monstrous" kingdom of the creatures, as they were regarded, was a very unpleasant surprise to both the Redguards and Bretons. An alliance between Daggerfall and the new kingdom of Sentinel led to the long war known as the Siege of Orsinium. The humans eventually prevailed: Orsinium was destroyed and the Orcs dispersed far and wide across Tamriel.

High Rock fared relatively well during the long interregnum following the fall of the Cyrodilic Empire, but its multitude of fractious kingdoms were easily conquered by Tiber Septim. Indeed, many Bretons welcomed the rebirth of the Empire. Still, some of them managed to unite to stop the encroachment of the Camoran Usurper in his destructive march northward from Valenwood in 3E 267. With a weak Emperor on the Imperial throne, and no clear leadership from the usual powers of the west, the Usurper may have swept over High Rock had the smallest regions of the Iliac Bay not banded together under the Baron of Dwynnen to defeat him. Once again, an overwhelming force had underestimated the Bretons, and been defeated.

The unity was lost when the threat was removed, and for the next one hundred and fifty years, internal and external conflicts continued. In the east, the Nords reclaimed some of their old kingdoms in the War of the Bend'r-Mahk. In the west, the War of Betony, though ostensibly between Daggerfall and Sentinel, spilled into Daggerfall's neighboring kingdoms. In the center, Orsinium reappeared as the home of the Orcs, threatening once again the fortunes of Wayrest. In the year 417, however, the province redefined itself in a most mysterious way.

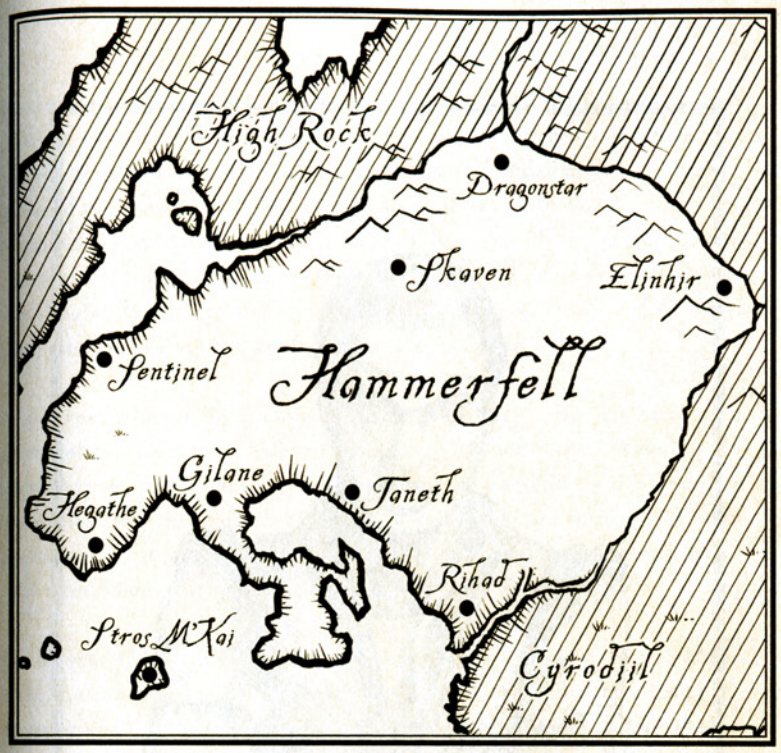
They call the event the Miracle of Peace. On the 10th of Frostfall, a strange force exploded over the Iliac Bay, displacing armies and decimating whole territories. Though its nature is still unknown, most Bretons believe it was the ancient Gods who had once made High Rock their home scouring the land, making it whole once again. Though it was a painful process for most — the Miracle is sometimes spoken of as the Warp in the West — the result of it is a province that is more unified than it has ever been in modern history.

Where once there were a hundred small squabbling kingdoms, today, just two decades after the Miracle, there are five.

Battle-weary, the kingdoms of High Rock have eschewed violence recently in favor of diplomatic solutions. This is not to say that there have been no tensions over the new borders between Daggerfall and Wayrest, or between Camlorn and Northpoint and Evermore, but they are localized skirmishes, and have yet to explode into war, as they might have done in the past. The royal family of Daggerfall has recently celebrated the marriage of their son Camaron to Lady Kelmena, the daughter of Duke Senhyn of Camlorn, suggesting a possible unified kingdom along the western coast of Tamriel. King Gothryd and Queen Aubk-i's own marriage twenty years before had cemented relations and formed the basis of the peace between Daggerfall and Sentinel, which continues to this day.

Northpoint and Evermore were not directly affected by the Miracle of Peace, but took advantage of it, swallowing up their smaller neighbors in the chaos of its aftermath. Far enough west to avoid the predations of Skyrim in the Bend'r-Mahk, and far enough north not to be targeted by Daggerfall and Wayrest, they have been quiet of late, watching their neighbors distrustfully.

The Queen of Wayrest, Elysana, is considered by many to be the most feared ruler in the West. It is hardly surprising, considering that in order to achieve the throne, she had to outmaneuver and defeat her stepbrother, Helseth, a man now renowned in the East for his cunning, as well as his mother, Barenziah. With her consort, Elysana continues to control and dominate politics in High Rock, and her recent alliance with Wayrest's old enemies, the Orcs of Orsinium, has many observers wondering what her next move will be.



THE RA GADA: HAMMERFELL

THE MOST RECENT ARRIVALS TO TAMRIEL'S SHORES ARE THE Redguards of Hammerfell. They quickly adapted to the harsh desert of their new homeland and made a former wasteland into a power to be reckoned with.

Hammerfell only acquired its name with the coming of the Redguards. Before then, it was called Hegathe by the Aldmer, and Deathland by the Nedic people, roughly saying the same thing. Hegathe, as a name, lives on as the name of the original Redguard capital, but into the First Era, the Nedic name began to be used by one and all to refer to the barren land north of Colovia, south of the Iliac Bay. Not that there was much reference to it historically. It was desolation, a wasteland where hot winds blew over burning rock, and the only feet that walked the sands belonged to monsters.

The elves and later the Bretons did set up outposts in what are now Sentinel and Lainlyn in order to protect their fisherfolk and seafaring merchants from the Orcs who had taken over the interior of the land. Nor were these the only dangers of record. Wind spirits, fire spirits, goblins, trolls, and scorpions the size of horses regularly crept in from the desert, and were rebuffed at the frontier, sometimes at a terrible cost.

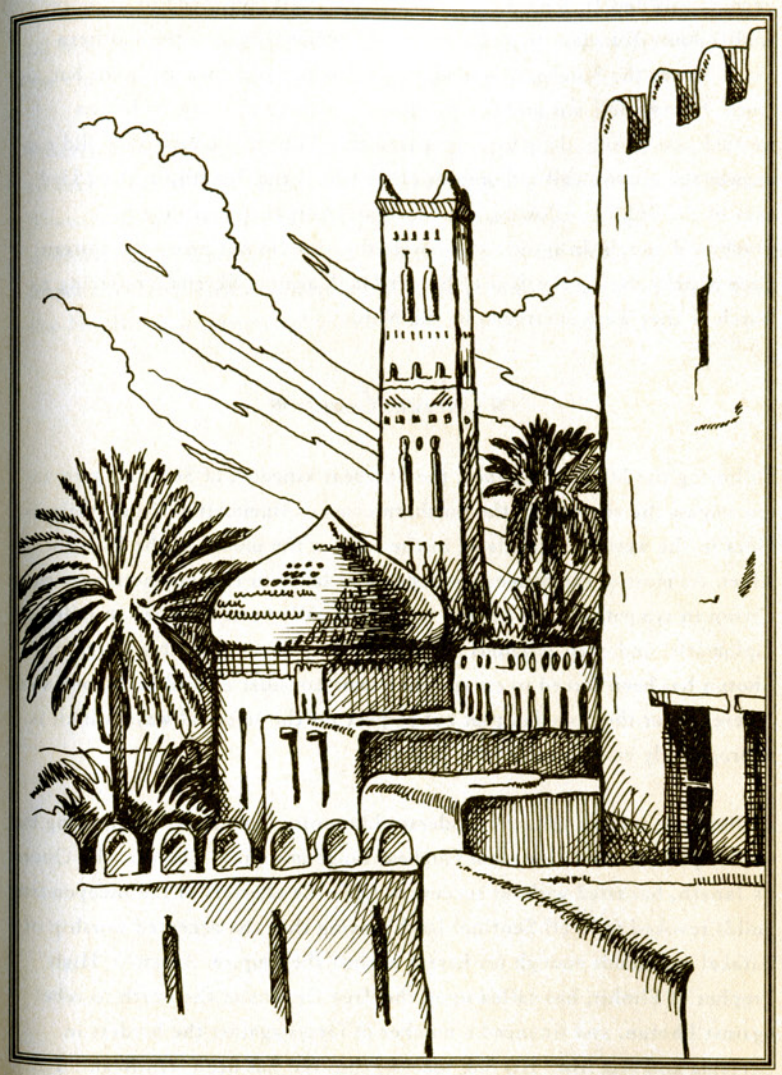
In the year 420 of the First Era, a tribe of Dwemer arrived in the Deathlands from the east. They were of Rourken's people, rebels against the alliance of Dunmer and Dwemer in Morrowind. Settling far from the Bay, along the southern coast, they soon established an easy trading relationship with the elves to the south and Bretons to the north, and the Deathlands took the Dwemer name of Volenfel, "City of the Hammer", after the Dwemer capital whose ruins now lie buried under the sands of the Alik'r near Gilane.

The House Rourken's severing of ties with the Dwemer in Resdayn did not protect them from the results of the War of the First Council. Like the other Dwemer, the Rourken seem to have vanished suddenly from Hammerfell, leaving their wonders to the open sky. Akaviri and Nordic pirates plundered much of value from the abandoned cities, predators from the inland desert prowled the empty streets, and the harsh elements took their toll as well. By the time of the Ra Gada, over a hundred years had passed since any civilization had touched southern Volenfel.

The Yokudans left their continent following a cataclysm (discussed in a later section of the Guide), arriving in Tamriel in an invading fleet called the Ra Gada. The disorganized Orcs fell to them quickly, as did all the infestations of monster and beast further inland. The Redguards, as the Ra Gada came to be called, made no concession to the Breton settlements along the coasts, slashing through the southern Iliac Bay, winning the entire area that is now the Province of Hammerfell in only a few major battles. The Na-Totambu, the government of Yokuda, was transplanted whole, together with their traditional system of agriculture and religion which was well suited to the unforgiving climate of the Redguards' new home. The high domes, the flying dew sails, and the mosaic colophons were constructed over the old and new ruins of past civilizations.

The Redguards' slaughter of men along the coast was not quickly forgiven, and their open scorn for their neighbors did nothing to ease relations between the newcomers and the Bretons. Over a century of unrelieved hostility only came to an end at the appearance of a common enemy in the form of the Orcish kingdom of Orsinium. Following the successful alliance, the cities of Hammerfell – as Volenfel had come to be called – finally began trading with High Rock and the Colovian West, joining the battles against new foes, such as the Sload of Thras, thanks to an alliance with Bendu Olo, the King of Anvil.

Over time, Redguard society divided into two groups, depending on their allegiance to the old Yokudan ways or the new ways of Tamriel. The Crowns, who followed the traditions of the Na-Totambu, violently resisted the efforts of the Forebears, named for the original warriors of the Ra Gada, to assimilate. With the death of the Crown High King Thassad II in the 864th year of the Second Era, Hammerfell was taken by the Septim Empire, though some concessions were made following a successful revolt in Stros M'Kai.



The division in Hammerfell society was not mended by joining the Empire, even to this day. In general, northern Hammerfell continued to be more traditionally Yokudan, in style, dress, and personality, and the southern lands, where the Forebears landed, tended to be more cosmopolitan; but, in truth, Hammerfell was and is a patchwork, with conflicting traditions nestled side by side. It is for this reason that Elinhir, a Crown city, did not answer the clarion call of Forebear cities Rihad and Taneth, in the 253rd year of the 3rd Era, allowing the Camoran Usurper to continue his northward march. In return, the Forebear cities did not assist the eastern Crown cities during the War of Bend'r-Mahk against Skyrim, preferring to watch as they were overtaken by the Nords.

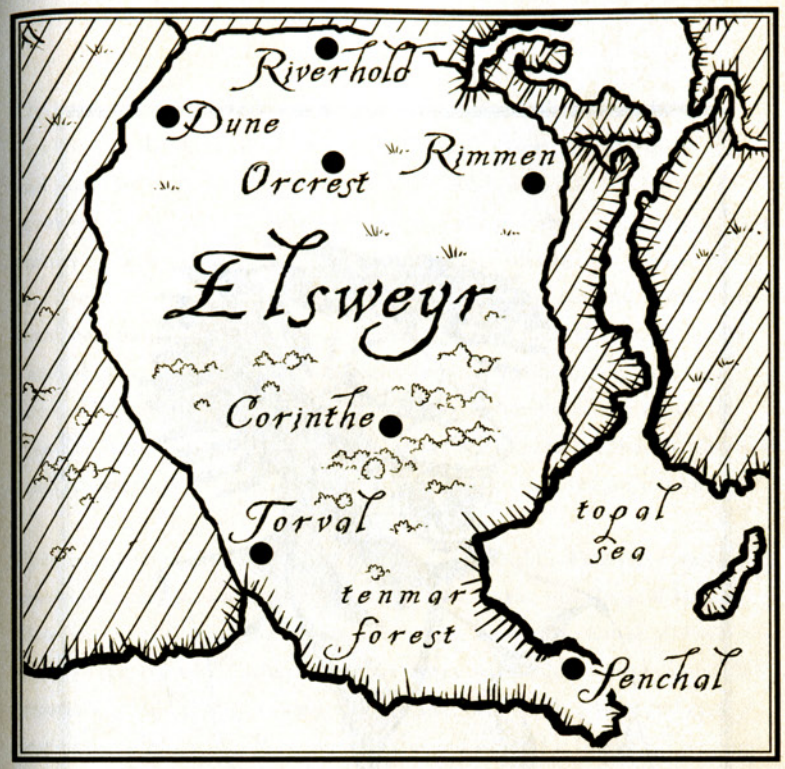
Current Events

Following the Miracle of Peace, the Forebear kingdom of Sentinel grew to encompass the entirety of the northern coast of Hammerfell, from Abibon-Gora in the west to Satakalaam in the east, at the mouth of the Bjoulsae River. As most of the formerly independent lands in this northern area were Crown in sympathy, King Lhotun has continually been involved in military, diplomatic, and even religious missions to keep them under his wing. Lhotun has been forced to create what some consider a third party, one with reverence for the Yokudan past but respect for the Imperial ways, which is appropriately enough called the Lhotunic.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the moderate Lhotunics have attracted nothing but contempt from the Crown and Forebear kingdoms alike. Clavilla, the Queen of Taneth, has tried without success to have the charters of the independent guilds revoked from all Sentinel lands, saying that the accepted worship of Satakal is grounds enough for heresy against the Empire. Ayaan-si, High Prophet of Elinhir, has called upon the True Crowns of the north to rebel against Lhotun, and financed a number of forays against the borders in Bergama and Dak'fron. His one success, thus far, has been significant. The land of Totambu, named in ancient days after the Na-Totambu of Yokuda,

the progenitors of the Crowns, has returned to his fold and declared independence from Sentinel. As Lhotun's kingdom surrounds Totambu on all four sides, it is questionable how much longer it can assert itself, but at the time of this writing, its people are holding their resistance.

Eastern Hammerfell, less concerned with Sentinel, has continued its efforts to take back the lands conquered by Skyrim in the War of Bend'r-Mahk. There is no question that Redguards, while currently lacking the cohesiveness as a society to form effective armies, are excellent warriors and unmatched at guerrilla warfare. Still, little ground has been regained, for the Nords too are renowned warriors.



SUGAR AND BLOOD: THE CATS OF THE SOUTH

IT IS SAID THAT A HUNDRED CIVILIZATIONS ARE BURIED beneath the sands of Elsweyr, and it may be unwise to assume our current Empire will forever stand above the shifting sands of the desert province. The Khajiit who occupy the southern land between Black Marsh and Valenwood have always been a restless people, and prove regularly that nothing in Tamriel is immortal.

History

Khajiit are commonly considered one of the beast folk, one of the few survivors of the original inhabitants of Tamriel before the coming of mer and man, and Elsweyr is their home. This tradition is not, of course, accepted by one and all. Alternate theories abound about their origin, based mainly around the fact that one of the breeds of Khajiit, the Ohmes-Raht, so closely resembles the elven folk that they could be cousins. Some believe that the Khajiit are simply descendants of the original Aldmer settlers in Tamriel, who evolved, like the Altmer, Bosmer, Dunmer, and Orsimer, because of circumstance, into the cat-like race that walks the dunes of Elsweyr. If so, they are just one more of the alien, sentient species who have made themselves so much a part of Tamriel to be confused for natives.

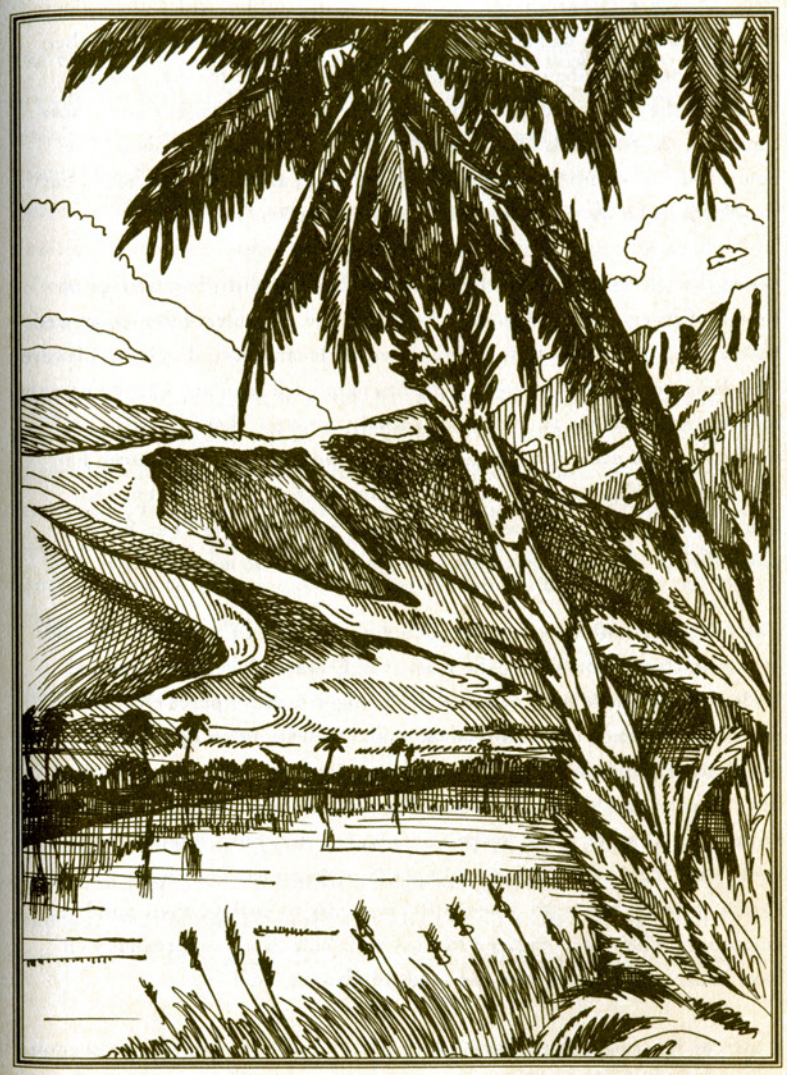
The more commonly held belief, however, is that they were not foreign intelligent creatures who became cats to survive the hostile, arid land of Elsweyr, but they were indigenous cats whose knack for change allowed them to survive while other native creatures declined and disappeared. It is strange to think that so inhospitable a land, of blistering heat and crop destroying wind, would have been the fecund womb for one of the original predators of Tamriel, but that seems to be the unlikely likelihood.

Topal the Pilot in his peregrinations around Tamriel encountered the Khajiit not in Elsweyr, but far up the Niben River, close to the Imperial City, where they preyed on other native creatures, and caused his crew much distress as they stalked the river banks. We have records too from the Merethic Bosmer that certain parts of Valenwood were to be avoided for fear of the great jungle cat men. It may be comfortably surmised that the Khajiit, though most at home in the deserts, reigned as the dominant culture across southern Tamriel in ancient days.

The Khajiit kingdoms were simply a fact when historians began to put quill to paper and record life for posterity. When the early human settlers in Tamriel were only just beginning to understand what plants grew where under what circumstance, there were already mercantile caravans in modern day Rimmen; when the transplanted natives of Atmora and Aldmeris were vying for dominance in the north, the Khajiit had already developed a sophisticated culture in the south.

In the early First Era, there were sixteen independent realms in Elsweyr. Unlike typical human and elvish kingdoms, these regions did not compete with one another for land and power. Earlier versions of this Guide spoke of tribal conflict, but the truth was quite the opposite in the earliest Khajiit society. Recognizing their own idiosyncratic characters and strengths, each territory specialized in one specific duty, supplying its neighbors with its bounty in exchange for equal measure. Ne Quin-al, where great warriors were born and trained — its Temple of Two-Moons Dance is famous even in our day — might trade its warriors to Torval in exchange for fish and other bounties of the sea. The dominance of each region was checked by the moons. It was said that when both moons were full, Ne Quin-al was in dominance; when both moons were half, Torval; when both moons were new, Senchal. The other regions too had their days of power and influence.

For a thousand years this delicate astronomic and political dance was equal to facing every threat posed against the Khajiit. The Alessian Empire chose not to extend its borders too far south, and the Bosmer of Valenwood likewise knew how far eastward they dared to extend their kingdom. But the terrible Thrassian Plague of 1E 2260 finally upset this balance forever. Travelling down the trade routes into the heart of Elsweyr, the plague decimated the Khajiit, forcing the survivors into roles they did not choose. Thus was the province turned from sixteen states to only two: Pa'alatiin and Ne Quin-al, more commonly known by their Cyrodilic names of Pellitine and Anequina.



The two kingdoms, of course, represented the moons at their extremes, but also radically different interpretations of Khajiit culture, which they adopted from the tribes each had absorbed. The people of Pellitine considered their neighbors in Anequina to be uncouth barbarians, while the Anequinians looked to the south, and saw only decadence and depravity. For many more centuries, the two lands fought, neither gaining appreciable ground. The South had the wealth and could hire mercenaries and withstand sieges, but the North had a warrior culture, and could never be dominated.

When the two united in 309th year of the 2nd Era with the marriage of Keirgo of Anequina and Eshita of Pellitine, the two rulers fully recognized how historic their pact was, and renamed their land accordingly, to Elsweyr. The derivation of this unusual name has perplexed scholars. One commonly held rationale hinges on a particular Khajiit proverb that "a perfect society is always found elsewhere," suggesting that the new King and Queen had that aim, and that sense of humor. Another is that it is a reference to Llesw'er, a paradise promised to the Khajiit by the Riddle'Thar. Either possibility points to an optimism which was not to be matched by reality.

The following centuries into and including the Third Era have been times of intermittent strife among the Khajiit of Elsweyr. Successive spiritual leaders, known as Manes, occasionally brought tenuous peace to the land, but never for long. The Khajiit have found security in being absorbed into the Cyrodilic and then the Septim Empires, only to rebel against both. They have sought solace in their rich literary tradition, finding the tales of Rajhin the Thief to speak to their people, but they have stopped the flow of books into their land, for fear of Imperial propaganda. They have tried to enrich their pockets with drug-trafficking, only to enslave their minds to moonsugar. They have engaged in wars with Valenwood on grounds that have constantly shifted, like the sands of Elsweyr itself.

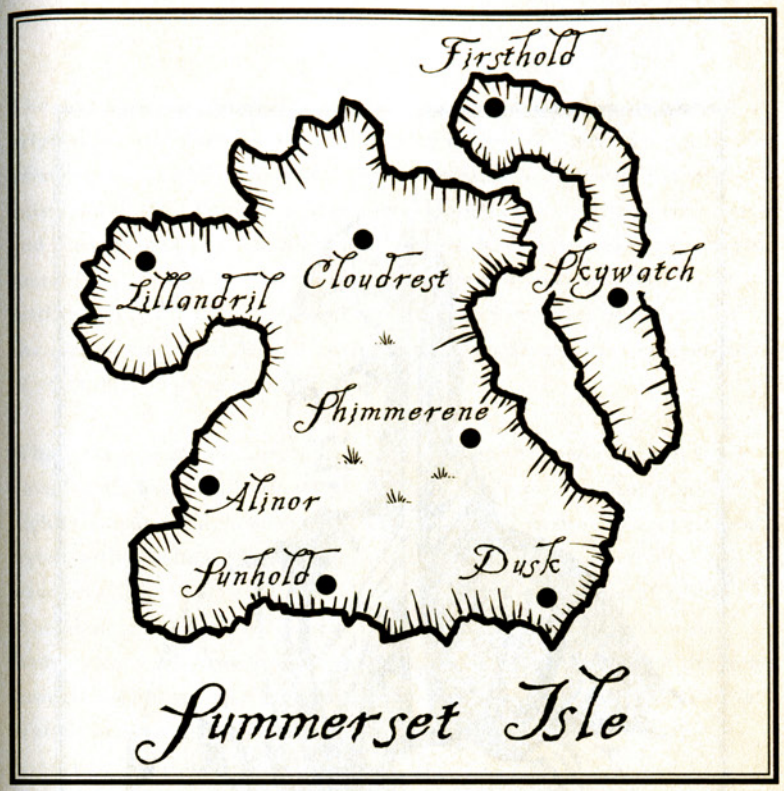
It may be fair to say that Elsweyr is in crisis. And it may further be accurate to say that such chaos is home.

Current Events

The Five Year War with Valenwood shifted the borders of Elsweyr slightly west, taking both banks of the Xylo River. At the end of the Imperial Simulacrum, a diplomatic attempt was made to return the land to Valenwood, but the Khajiit settlers who had already claimed the land refused to move. The Empire eventually found that it was best to leave the situation as it was, possibly persuaded by legal proof that the land rightly belonged to the Khajiit by ancient treaty, and to keep a dangerous situation from getting worse.

Elsweyr's overall territory, however, has not increased, due to a border arrangement which was not in that nation's favor. In the east, the long-disputed border with the Cyrodilic County Leyawiin was recently resolved in Cyrodiil's favor, after an agreement between the current Mane and the Count of Leyawiin. But a group of Khajiit bandits known as the Renrijra Krin has taken up the cause of returning the land to Elsweyr, and the West Niben remains a trouble spot.

The harbor city of Senchal, long considered one of the most dangerous slums in Tamriel, has had a remarkable renaissance, from principle port of the drug trade, to coastal resort for wealthy, powerful Khajiit. That glimmer of good news belies the fact that the moonsugar trade in Elsweyr has increased multifold in the last twenty years. Ya'Tirrje, the Gold Cat, is rumored to even have a luxurious villa in Senchal, and helps pay for the abundant security that keeps the city safe and crime-free, all the while continuing his drug-smuggling business in Torval, Corinthe, and Rimmen.



THE BLESSED ISLE: ALINOR AND THE SUMMERSETS

NOT A SINGLE ISLE AT ALL BUT AN ARCHIPELAGO OF two major islands and a dozen smaller ones, the land called Summerset is the birthplace of civilization and magic as we know it in Tamriel. On its idyllic sea-kissed shores live the Altmer, the High Elves.

The Aldmer, the progenitor races of all elves, arrived in Tamriel from their original home in Aldmeris or Old Ehlnofey in ancient times. We don't know what precipitated this exodus or even the location of Aldmeris if it still exists today. Most scholars believe that the Aldmer settled Summerset first, and then spread out across the rest of Tamriel, but there is some evidence to support the theory that Summerset was only one of several initial settlements of the earliest Aldmer. In any case, Summerset became one of the earliest centers of Aldmer civilization, which developed over thousands of years into the Altmer of historical times.

What creatures and prehistoric civilizations these Aldmeris refugees faced have largely been lost in the mists of time. Cloudrest, atop Eton Nir, the highest mountain in Summerset, is a decidedly odd mixture of architectural styles, with buildings like strangler vines, built on top of other, older structures. The oldest of all the ruins there, and in a few isolated spots throughout the island, are made of coral, which must have been carried many, many miles away from the sea. The material and the style of the ruins strongly suggest that the Sload may have once counted Summerset as a part of their kingdom of Thras. More evidence of this may be found in the section on Thras in this Pocket Guide.

The treasury of the Crystal Tower and private collections in Summerset offer suggestions of other creatures the early Aldmer may have met in their new home, portrayed in sculpture and tapestry. Some of the beasts are surely (and hopefully) the work of the artist's imagination, but others appear with such regularity, it can only be that they once existed, as bizarre as they seem. Though no one alive has ever seen them, they have names out of legend: Gheatus, a man or a group of men who are formed by the earth itself; the Welwa, strange, holy beasts of horns and savage teeth, depicted as ravagers and saviors of the land; the Ilyadi, giants taller than the trees, with eyes that cover their heads. These extinct monsters, and others like them, had to be defeated by the Aldmer in days of yore.

Early Aldmer society was agricultural and politically egalitarian. A system of ancestor worship had been exported whole from Aldmeris, and it brought with it a communal spirit that served the early settlers of Summerset well. When the Aldmer came together as a people to create the Crystal Tower, it was not a monument to any king or god, but rather to the spirit of the elven people, living and dead. Within the glittering walls of the Tower are housed the graves of the early Aldmeri settlers, preserved forever as a lasting symbol of the power of the people for that brief moment in history, fully unified.

Gradually, as the society grew, social stratification increased. A hierarchy of classes began to form, which is still largely enforced in Summerset to this day. At the top are the Wise, teachers and priests, followed by Artists, Princes, Warriors, Landowners, Merchants, and Workers. Below Workers were the beasts, such as the enslaved goblins, who the Aldmer used to perform the jobs beneath the dignity of the very least of them. The religion of the people also changed because of this change in society: no longer did the Aldmer worship their own ancestors, but the ancestors of their "betters." Auriel, Trinimac, Syrabane, and Phynaster are among the many ancestor spirits who became Gods. A group of elders rebelled against this trend, calling themselves the Psijics, the keepers of the Old Ways of Aldmeris. With their mystical powers, they were able to settle in Artaeum, away from what they considered the corruption of their society. They continued to return to the land to act as advisors, but never again would they call Summerset home.

It was about this time that many Aldmer left Summerset to settle the mainland of Tamriel. There was probably no single reason for this second exodus of the Aldmer, but some evidence, such as the famed Ramoran Tapestries — the very ones that show some of the creatures mentioned above — show how untouched and beautiful the mainland was considered to

be by the Aldmer. Expeditions, such as those taken by Topal the Pilot and others, had painted an image in their minds of a great land where even workers at the lowest end of the Summerset hierarchy could live as kings. The Prophet Veloth was among those who led a group of discontented Aldmer away from Summerset to a new promised land.

According to the traditions of Summerset, the Aldmer who went to be free on the mainland became all the disparate elven folk of history: Chimer, Bosmer, Ayleid. The ones who stayed behind became the Altmer. Even the earliest records of Summerset, however, shed no light on the origins of the Dwemer, who already occupied the northeast of Tamriel when Veloth and his people arrived there.

The history of the Summerset Isle in the First Era and most of the Second is very much removed from the rest of mainland Tamriel. The rise and fall of Empires, the battles between man and mer, none of these touched the Altmer as a society. Internal conflicts between Skywatch and Firsthold, and between Alinor and Lillandril, often sparked into full war, but far deadlier were the repeated attempts at invasion from the alien lands of Thras and Pyandonea.

The Sload of Thras, as we have mentioned earlier, may have been original inhabitants of Summerset, and so their repeated attempts to take the islands could be regarded sympathetically, if not for their methods. Physically unable to fight due to their massive girth, the Sload used necromantic magic and infernal machines to attack the Altmer. Though they never succeeded in reclaiming Summerset, if that was even their goal, they visited horrors upon the land which are still remembered today: the Sack of Skywatch in 2E 1301 and the War of the Uvichil from 2E 2911 to 2E 2917 are surely among the most terrible events in Tamriel's history.

The Maormer of Pyandonea (described more fully in a later section of this Guide) were even more relentless in their drive to conquer Summerset. The chronicler can scarcely find a year throughout the First and Second Eras when the Maormer did not ravage the coastlines of the Altmer. As terrible as it was, it did force the Altmer to build a great navy to defend itself, and to this day, it is on the seas that the High Elves excel in combat. There are villages in the central valleys of Summerset that have never seen battle, but so much blood has been spilled along the coasts, it is a wonder it is not stained permanently crimson.

The formation of the Aldmeri Dominion in the Second Era is discussed in the section on Summerset's ally, Valenwood. For Summerset, the kings of Colovia were no threat, but the Dominion allowed them to eliminate the Maormer outposts that had been established along the western coast of the mainland. Thus, the Dominion thrived until the coming of Tiber Septim.

The conquest and assimilation of Summerset into the Empire is remembered by many a living Altmer with horror only partially diminished by time. Certainly, the pride of the people has never recovered. During the War of the Isle in 3E 110, the Maormer of Pyandonea were very nearly successful in conquering their ancient enemy, and the Altmer had to call upon the aid of the Psijics and the Empire to help defend themselves. Even as recently as twenty years ago during the Imperial Simulacrum, when the Altmer invaded Valenwood, their former allies in the Dominion, Summerset was only successful in capturing a small sliver of the coastline that used to be theirs. It is hardly surprising that to many in Summerset, particularly the young, it is time to reinvent what it is to be a High Elf.

In the last few years, Summerset Isle has been at peace with its neighbors. To all outward appearances, it has returned to its normal state of unchanging tranquility. In fact, the Altmer are perhaps the most bitterly divided society in the Empire. The war in the province today is a cultural one, which has its origins with the surrender to Tiber Septim four centuries ago which shook Altmer society to its very foundations. While in Skyrim and Morrowind more blood has been shed in recent years, this struggle between the old and the new may have even more radical end results. The very future of the oldest province in the Empire of Tamriel is at stake.

For thousands of years, the Altmer have implicitly believed in their superiority to all other races and cultures in Tamriel. For much of this time, they may have been right. But after the incorporation of Summerset into the Empire, doubts began to creep in. With the insularity of the Summerset decisively broken, many Altmer, particularly the young (which among the High Elves is a fairly loose term), began to take a more critical view of the rigid heirarchy of Altmer society and its strict cultural xenophobia. While there had always been discontent on the fringes of Altmer society, which was traditionally resolved by exile of the malcontents, for the first time a significant element of Altmer began to agitate for social change.

This nascent revolution in the Summerset Isle has taken many forms. Most constructive, surely, is the acceptance of new cultures and races onto its shores, some occupying positions that would have been forbidden just a century ago. The Queen of Firsthold, for example, is the Dunmer Morgiah, daughter of Barenziah and sister of the King of Morrowind, Helseth. Her children, Goranthir and Rinnala, though half-Altmer, are fully Dunmer in appearance, and stand to inherit the throne.

A darker side of this movement, however, is exhibited by a shadowy group who call themselves the Beautiful. Originally a salon for artists with the reasonable philosophy that Summerset must let go of its past in order to move forward, the Beautiful became a revolutionary gang dedicated to the destruction of the greatest monuments of Altmer civilization. The Crystal Tower was naturally an early target, and fortunately attempts against it have failed, but many other great, ancient sculptures and emblems of the past have been vandalized. Lately, the Beautiful have turned their attention to living symbols of the Isle, the royalty of Summerset. The particularly gruesome murder of the daughter of the King of Shimmerene has horrified and outraged the public.

Finally, some of Summerset's youth are rebelling against their present, ironically, by embracing their past. The Imperial Geographical Society is not allowed to visit the isle of Artaeum to survey and document it, but there is little doubt that the Psijic Order is increasingly popular among the young, and is willing to exploit this. Over the past thousand years, only seventeen new initiates were brought into the order. In the past two years, however, another thirty have joined. Thirty new members of an Order may not be enough to be considered a surprising trend in most circles, but to the tradition-bound graycloaks of Artaeum, it raises many questions. What the Psijics' aim in this recent recruitment, however, is anyone's guess at this time.

THE WILDS REMAIN: VALENWOOD

THE GREAT FOREST TO THE SOUTH-WEST OF THE continent has long been a buffer between the ambitions of the humans of Cyrodiil and the elves of Summerset. A sea of endless green, a maze of foliage with half-hidden cities growing like blooms from a flower, the home of the Bosmer is Tamriel's garden.

History

The history of Valenwood stretches back to the very beginning of recorded time: the date traditionally used as the start of the First Era is the founding of the Camoran Dynasty by King Eplear of Valenwood.

The history of the land, of course, began long before the first year of the First Era. Before man or mer came to Valenwood, the forestland was a salmagundi of creatures and strange civilizations. Centaurs, hippogriffs, satyrs, minotaurs, giants, basilisks, fairy folk, hydra, and intelligent apes all flourished there before the first Aldmeri stepped onto its shores. Indeed, the first challenge for the early Aldmeri was to rise from prey to predator in the forest's intricate heirarchy of life.

As the Aldmer began to change their ways to match their new environment, adapting to the forest in body and mind, they became known as the Bosmer. In return for the patronage of Y'ffre, the Forest God (either one of the old ancestor spirits or an aspect of the true pantheon), they swore never to kill, injure, or eat any of the vegetation of their new home.

Eplear's success in uniting the inherently wild Bosmer must be counted among the greatest military feats in Tamriel's history. The Camoran Dynasty was itself a far different beast than the empires of man that also rose in the First Era. In the forests, after all, diversity was the law, and the Bosmer welcomed escaped slaves from the Ayleids, and then Ayleids fleeing the Alessian rebellion, and finally the new Empire itself, forming a trade treaty in 1E 340 with men who had only recently thrown off the brutal Ayleid yoke.

The treaty was short-lived, however, and hostility grew between the Dynasty and the Empire as the prophet Marukh's teachings began to spread. One of Marukh's chief supporters, the Nord King Borgas, became a victim of Valenwood's infamous Wild Hunt as he travelled to Cyrodiil to urge a joint war against the Bosmer. Thus did Valenwood simultaneously defend itself and strike a devastating blow against its new enemies. Skyrim would spend the next fifty years in turmoil.

Even with the eventual dissolution of the Alessian Reform of Marukh, battles continued to be waged along the Cyrodiil and Valenwood border lands. When the Empress Herda improved relations with the Colovian West, the attacks only intensified, though it was not until 1E 2714 – after unrelenting warfare and a devastating plague from the island of Thras – that Valenwood fell to the Cyrodilic Empire. The Camoran Dynasty as an entity still existed, but its power was diminished. The Empire, eager to make sure that Valenwood would not unite against its new occupiers, granted independence to each treethane of the Dynasty, so nevermore would they battle together against a common foe. Falinesti, Silvenar, Haven, Archen, Eldenroot, and Woodhearth rose from being local trading posts to full-fledged powers in their own right.

For centuries, the Bosmer were obedient if not particularly loyal subjects of the Cyrodilic Empire. At the fall of the Cyrodilic Empire in 2E 430, the Camorans attempted to reinstate their authority over the other kingdoms, but culturally each had drifted too far away to be united. Without any other greater power to rein in their ambitions, they began to war against one another, the Khajiit to the east, and the Colovians to the north. Valenwood ate away at itself, and offered no resistance to the coastal encroachments of the Maormer of Pyandonea. It took another outside force to reunify Valenwood: the home of the ancient Bosmer, Summerset Isle.

The unified elven kingdom of Valenwood and Summerset, the Aldmeri Dominion, was the most stable power in Tamriel until the coming of Tiber Septim. The new government of Valenwood was called the Thalmor, a congress of Bosmeri chieftains and Altmeri diplomats. While not particularly popular, the Thalmor proved better than the chaos of the previous years, and endured until Tiber Septim's armies swept it away.

Wisely, the Emperor allowed Valenwood to keep some of the symbols of her independence, such as the tribal councils and a figurehead Camoran king. For two hundred and fifty years, Valenwood was at peace. The War of the Isle and the War of the Red Diamond, which ravaged other parts of the Empire, left it unscathed. The Empire used the province as it saw fit, and neglected it otherwise. Gradually, the Bosmer began to grow resentful of an authority which seemed increasingly alien – perfect breeding ground for the horror which was to follow.

In the year 249 of the Third Era, a pretender to the ancient throne of the Camorans appeared, and with mundane and Daedric allies, stormed across Valenwood, destroying all who stood against him. The Bosmer were slow to unite against the threat, many too terrified to stand against the Camoran Usurper and some delighted that they were being freed, however violently, from the perceived yoke of Empire. This minority grew as the Usurper's power did, and once he had consolidated his power in Valenwood, he turned his attention northward. It took nearly two decades of tyranny before Valenwood found the strength to shrug off Haymon Camoran's rule. When he lost his seat of power, the Usurper's conquests in Colovia and Hammerfell rose in revolt, and his army was destroyed in the Iliac Bay between Hammerfell and High Rock in 3E 267.

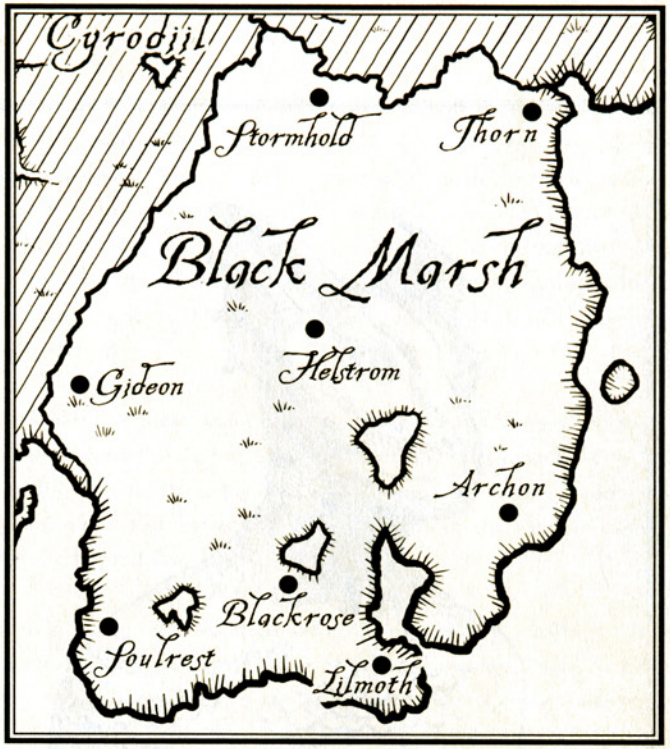
The Valenwood the Usurper left behind was a broken land. No longer trusting the Empire or Summerset for support, or its local leaders for guidance, the Bosmer have become more and more isolationist in temperament. The people began leaving the cities, preferring life in the forests, returning to their earliest traditions. It is not surprising that when the province showed signs of weakness, its rapacious neighbors chose to attack.

No other province suffered more during the Imperial Simulacrum than Valenwood. With the Empire unwilling to lend its assistance and defend her, the land was attacked from the east by Elsweyr and from the west by Summerset Isle, both taking sizeable chunks of the Bosmeri land.

Current Events

The political weakness of Valenwood has been evident for more than twenty years now, and the Bosmer seem resigned to this state of affairs. The land is considered by most to be a mere geographical designation without any political purpose. If there is honor or pride, it is with one's family or clan. National feeling, never strong, seems to have died. The tribal council has not met in decades. Valenwood appears to be adrift.

And yet there are signs of other forces stirring. The Wild Hunt has been sighted for the first time in over five hundred years, although to what purpose is not yet clear. Falinesti, the "walking city" of trees, has rooted itself for the first time in recorded history. A new Bosmer prophet has arisen, known only as the Precursor, who preaches that the old Forest God Y'ffre is returning with new gifts for his favored people. Whether these are isolated events, or signs of some great change coming to Valenwood, remains to be seen.



THE WAR WITH THE TREES: ARGONIA AND THE BLACK MARSH

IT HAS BEEN CALLED THE GARBAGE HEAP OF TAMRIEL, to where everything rotten and despoiled eventually flows. Its borderlands and coasts have been ravaged by civilization after civilization, but its heart is inviolate, for so poisonous is its air, ground, and water, its mysteries are secure. Detractors long ago called the southeastern swampland of Tamriel "Black Marsh," but to its admirers, of whom there are a few, it is Argonia.

History

Every Province of Tamriel has its secret histories, but no land in the Empire is as undocumented and unexplored as Black Marsh. We know that Topal the Pilot and other early Aldmeri explorers passed through the "fetid, evil swamp lands and their human lizards," suggesting an early primitive species that might be related to the modern day Argonians. By the phrasing of the poet's words, it is also clear that Black Marsh had begun its long tradition of being a place no one would want to live in, man or mer, which it maintains into the present day.

Yet, people did live there, and people did move there. Compared to much of Tamriel, there have been a large variety of cultures that have lived in Black Marsh at different points in the past. Most surprisingly from a modern perspective, we hear of few wars or conflicts between these cultures until well into the Second Era.

In additional to the reptilian Argonians, who are today Black Marsh's most visible denizen, there were once tribes of men – Kothringi, Orma, Yerpest, Horwalli — and tribes of mer — the Barsaebic Ayleids and the Cantemiric Velothi — and even a tribe who may have been related to the Khajiit of Elsweyr, the vulpine Lilmothiit. Some were sent to Black Marsh as refugees or prisoners, others settled along the coastal waterways and adapted to its strange and usually insalubrious environment.

The cities of Stormhold and Gideon were originally founded by the Ayleids (their Ayleid names are unknown), but were so far removed from their culture in the heartland that they never were attacked by the Alessian army when it rose in revolt. The southern coastal regions, not surprisingly, were the realms of the Lilmothiit, though they were a nomadic group and left few enduring signs of their existence that were not covered up by later civilizations. The Black Marsh elves settled in the eastern regions near present-day Archon, Arnesia, and Thorn.

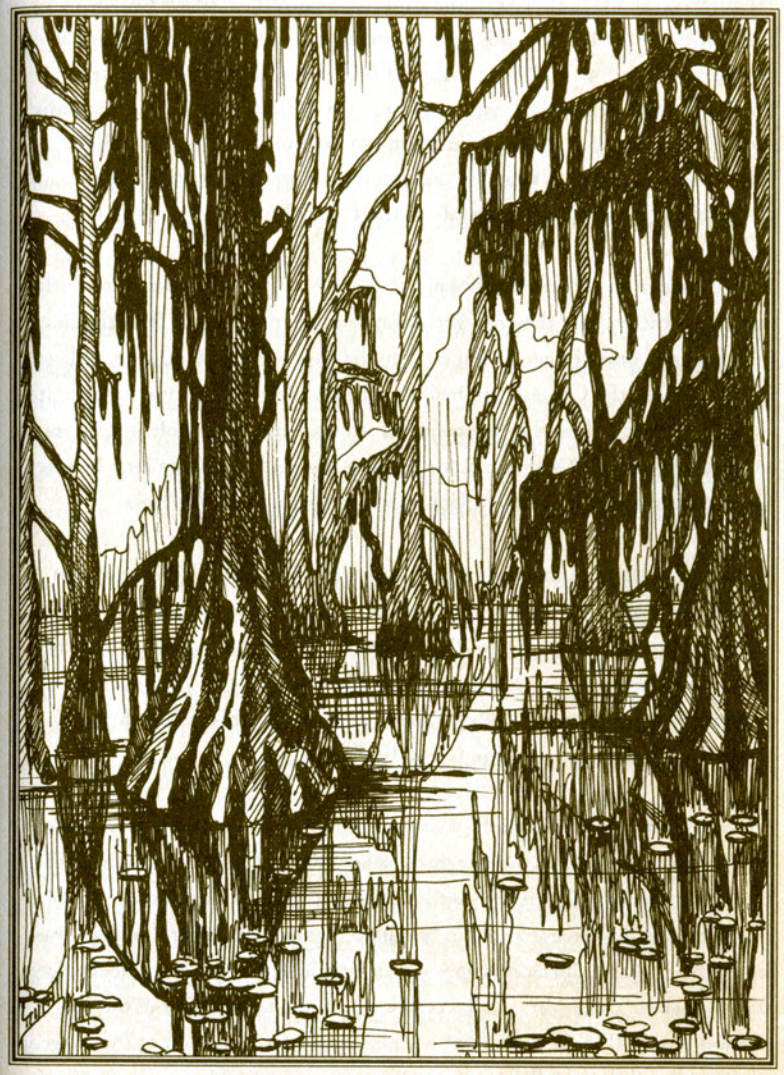
The origin of the species associated with the name "Argonian" is the stuff of myth, not history. We know they were spoken of in various terms by the early non-reptilian inhabitants of Black Marsh, as everything from funny curiosities that would wander in from the misty, mephitic inland bayous for short times, to noble heroes who saved the innocent from the horrors of the swamps, to savage monsters who terrorized communities.

The historian Brendan the Persistent writes, "The Argonian people have, throughout Tamrielic history, been perhaps the most misunderstood, vilified, and reviled of all the sentient races. Yet, those who have taken the time to experience Argonian culture have gained a greater appreciation for this noble and beautiful people." It should be noted that the historian disappeared during his final expedition into the deeper swamps of Black Marsh.

Rumors and speculation also abound regarding the Hist, a species of giant spore tree growing in the innermost swamps of Argonia. Some have maintained that natives worship the trees; others claim the trees are, in fact, a sentient race, more ancient than all the races of man and mer. No reliable accounts of expeditions into central Argonia exist to lend credence to these claims, and modern Argonians are reticent to speak of the mysterious trees.

The Argonians, as they came to be called, only occasionally left their homeland, though we find individuals in other parts of Tamriel in the early years of the First Era. The expatriates from Black Marsh did not offer any great insight into the tribal customs of their people, preferring to assimilate into the larger Tamrielic culture. Certainly, outside experience with the natives of Black Marsh in their own folkways, at least in any official capacity, was sporadic until the middle of the First Era.

A very successful enterprise of bandits and thieves had long been exploiting the swamplands of southeastern Tamriel, a convenient location to the riches of the Empire, where one could disappear without recourse. The coastline along the east of Topal Bay had become notorious for acts of piracy, and in 1E 1033, the Empress Hestra demanded the head of the most infamous of the brigadiers, "Red" Bramman.



After many an unsuccessful battle in the Bay, the Imperial Navy discovered the pirate-king's means of escaping capture: a narrow, winding river which emptied into the Bay near Soulrest, its mouth screen by dense thickets of mangroves. The Imperial Fleet followed the course deeper into the heart of Black Marsh than any non-Argonian had ever been before. They eventually caught Bramman in his bandit kingdom not far from what is now called Blackrose, and took his head for the Empress. More importantly, they provided the first reliable accounts of the true culture of Black Marsh.

The Argonians in the interior swamps of Black Marsh were skittish, and little wonder, as the contact they had with men from the outside was from the like of Bramman and other brigands. Imperial civilization was, to them, rape, pillage, and slavery. As the Cyrodiils pushed deeper into their land, trying to settle it along the pirate routes, they encountered stronger and more violent resistance with each incursion. Once the pirate menace was dealt with, the First Empire was generally content to leave Black Marsh to its native inhabitants.

It was not until the time of the Second Empire that Black Marsh was first "conquered", at least in name. In 1E 2811, at the Battle of Argonia, the last organized army of reptilians in Black Marsh's history was defeated, and they retreated to Helstrom, into the impenetrable center of the Province where the men and mer wouldn't follow. The following year, Black Marsh was officially incorporated into the Cyrodilic Empire.

The coastal areas and some parts of the interior where it was safe to travel received Imperial leaders to rule in the emperor's name. The land that had once been the home of freedom for Tamriel's criminals became its greatest prison state. Anyone considered too dangerous to hold in "civilized" dungeons in other Provinces was sent to Black Marsh. Its most famous convicts include the notorious axe murderer Nai, the heretic Devir-Mir, and Tavia, the wife of the last emperor of the First Era, who was sent to Gideon in 1E 2899, accused of treason. The worst of the dungeons was constructed in the following era by Potentate Versidae-Shae on the ruins of

the Lilmothiit community called Blackrose. The Rose, as it is called, is still the most secure and notorious prison of our own time, where Jagar Tharn's associates who were not executed await their final end.

In the chaos of the Second Era, banditry returned to Black Marsh in force. Slave traders from Morrowind were freer than ever to exploit their southern neighbor, and entire tribes of Argonians were dragged in chains to the Dunmer land. Former Imperial officials founded warlord dynasties which earned a reputation for tyranny even in that dark time.

Whether the terrible Knahaten Flu arose from natural causes, or was created by an Argonian shaman in retaliation for his people's oppression, is still a matter of debate. But its result was clear. The plague began in Stormhold in 2E 560, and quickly spread to every corner of Black Marsh, killing all those not of reptilian stock. For over forty years, it held the Province in its grip, decimating entire cultures (notably, the Kothringi) and driving outsiders from the land.

Even when the land became inhabitable again, fear of the disease kept most outsiders away. House Dres of Morrowind continued to send slavers into the north, but few others saw any reason to trouble themselves with the land. Even Tiber Septim, it was said, thought twice before conquering Black Marsh for his new Empire. The borders of the province fell easily to his forces, but he wisely decided to avoid the strategically unimportant inner swamps, and thus met with little resistance.

Black Marsh's position in the Third Era has been much the same as it has been throughout the other times in history. The Empire finds strategic benefit in holding the coasts, and keeps its most dangerous criminals in Blackrose and other dungeons closer to its interior. The heart of Black Marsh remains the sole province of the reptilian Argonians, and any further annexation of this area by Imperial forces seems unlikely.

Black Marsh continues to be a "backward" land economically by Imperial standards. Most of the agriculture is grown by subsistence farmers, though recently more has been shipped abroad, of Tamriel. Banditry appears to be on the decline in recent years, with most criminal acts being perpetrated not by outsiders, but by natives, such as the "Naga" thugs of Argonian stock. Rumors persist of gangs such as these smuggling powerful drugs across the borders of Black Marsh, but this has remained unproven to this day. Still, the Emperor's fleet guards the Topal Bay carefully, protecting merchants from the pirates who have never truly been eliminated.

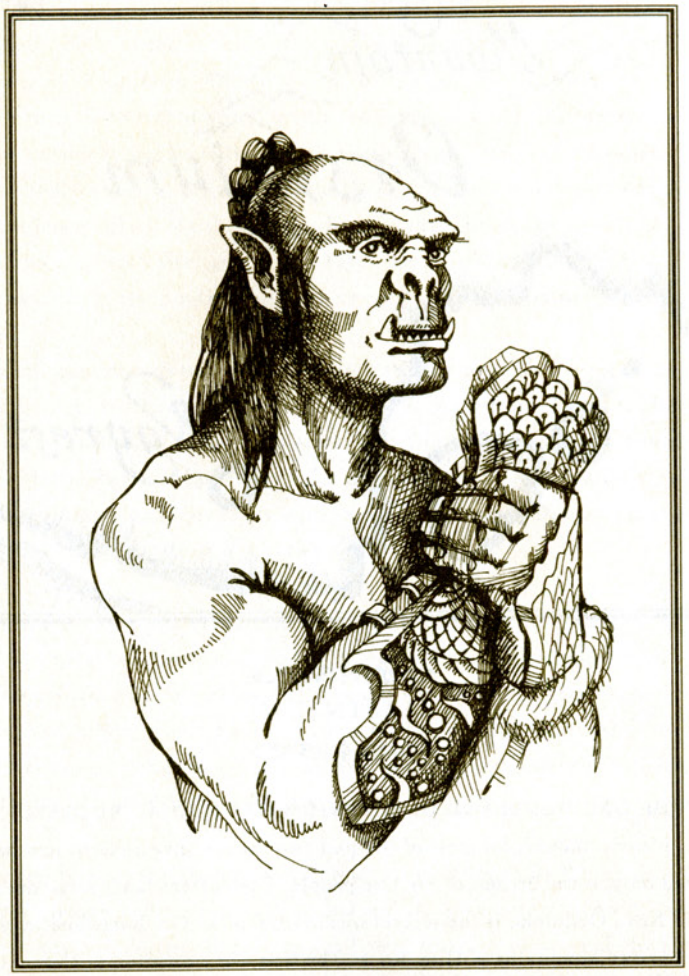
Imperials continue to rule in the Empire's name along the coastal cities of the Province, but most have native Argonians as advisors. These Archeins also act as governors in the rural areas that still make up the majority of Black Marsh. Beyond the reach of the Empire, there is little supervision of the inner swamplands, and it is unknown whether or not these areas even recognize Imperial rule of the Province.

Since the abolishment of slavery, Black Marsh's relationship with its northern neighbor Morrowind has been much improved, though border clashes continue as Argonians have begun to reclaim land conquered during the Arnesian War. There have also been reports of minor skirmishes with Imperial troops along the coastal regions, but it is not believed that there is any threat posed by these isolated incidents.

More troubling is the recent prison break at the formidable Blackrose Prison. Though it has since been sealed and its weak points mended, some of the worst murderers, thieves, and political revolutionaries had already escaped into the swamps. It is believed unlikely that any of them could have survived the cruel, dangerous lands of inner Black Marsh.

ORSINIUM

THE ORC HOMELAND OF ORSINIUM HAS HAD A TROUBLED history. Indeed, for most of the past two thousand years Orsinium has existed only in the dreams of the Orc people. The current land, sometimes called Nova Orsinium, is the second incarnation of an Orc homeland in the Wrothgarian Mountains of High Rock. The first was a creation of the tenth century of the Second Era, a refuge for Orcs harried from High Rock, Cyrodiil, and Skyrim by the expansions of the Empires of the men and mer.



High in the mountains, far from their enemies, the Orc chieftain Torug gro-Igron brought his people together. A few huts grew into more permanent structures as word spread to the far-flung Orcs of Tamriel that there was a civilization on the rise that would welcome them from their wanderings. If the Myth of Mauloch is to be believed, the Orcs or Orsimer had been pariah of the land for two hundred years, and if it is not true, their destitution was even longer. The dream of Orsinium was too beautiful not to be sought.

It is impossible to achieve an objective look at the reality of the first Orsinium. The chronicles of the time paint a picture of a fortress ruled by savage law, leading raids on its neighbors along the Bjoulsae River. According to Orc historians, though, it was a utopia, a peaceable land of agriculture and commerce. The truth is likely somewhere in between, but all written and archeological evidence was destroyed in the Siege of Orsinium. For thirty years, a joint military force from Daggerfall, Sentinel, and the Ansei Order of Diagna attempted to breach the seemingly impenetrable walls of Torug gro-Igron's fortress kingdom. In 1E 980, they succeeded, annihilating all who lived within, scattering the stones into dust.

The Orsimer exodus was long and particularly deleterious to the character of its people. They had never been well-regarded by the other inhabitants of Tamriel, but now, with no hope, they became little more than monsters. Other Orcs with vision attempted to create new homelands over the next three thousand years, but all were attacked and destroyed before they could take root.

In 3E 399, however, a new Orc visionary, Gortwog gro-Nagorm acquired the land near the former site of Orsinium, and began to construct a new city for his people. Graced by statues of Orc heroes such as Mauloch and Torug, and built of iron, Nova Orsinium seemed destined to provoke the same reaction by its neighbors as its predecessor did. Gortwog, however, proved a

diplomatic as well as a political genius, and his land has prospered. Following the events of the Miracle of Peace, it now encompasses a substantial territory of central High Rock, and its application for elevation to Provincial status is under review by the Imperial authorities. Its recent alliance with its former foe in Wayrest shows promise for a stable future.

The only troubling sign for Orsinium is a religious conflict that has brewed over the last ten years. Traditionally, the Orcs have worshipped the Daedra Malacath (Mauloch) as their patron deity. Gortwog, however, has established a new priesthood devoted to the worship of Trinimac, the ancient hero of the Orcs, who legend has it was devoured by Boethia and became the Daedra Malacath. The Orc King's belief that Trinimac still lives and that Malacath is a separate entity, a demon whose aim was to keep the Orsimer pariah folk forever, is the official position of the shaman priests of Orsinium. A minority of traditionalists within the territory, and the majority of Orcs without, view this as heresy. There is fear even among those who support Gortwog and Orsinium that turning their back on the Daedric Prince of the Bloody Oath is dangerous policy indeed.

Other Lands

TAMRIEL IS OF COURSE JUST ONE CONTINENTAL SYSTEM on the planet Nirn. How many others are out there is a matter of conjecture, for the oceans of Mundus are as dangerous to travel as the pathways of Oblivion. The following have had some influence on Tamriel, but perhaps other lands, far away, also exist, waiting inclusion in some future edition of this Guide.

Thras

THE CORAL KINGDOM HAS BEEN A POWERFUL antagonistic force against the Summerset Isle since before recorded time. As mentioned in an earlier section, the Sload may have at one time even called Summerset a part of Thras. For millennia, the hulking, slug-like creatures, notorious for the necromantic mastery, terrorized the Altmer, conjuring sea monsters along the coasts and laying siege to Skywatch. For naughty High Elf children, a mother's warning that the Sload will get them is enough to give nightmares for days. Yet, for all the horror and devastation that has come out of Thras, we know relatively little about the land itself.

The first maps we have from cartographers who sailed to Thras and returned to tell the tale shows a group of sixteen islands, in a semicircle like a partially submerged coral atoll. Over the centuries other maps have been charted by spies, and the number and size of islands has varied, suggesting that the amphibious Sload have a volatile kingdom which fluctuates its land mass, either by the tides or some other, less natural means. The largest of

the islands (called Agonio on the most recent maps) seems the most stable, though later maps show it considerably larger than earlier ones.

The true and permanent aspect of Thras, however, is not something mapmakers would know, merely looking at the land above the surface. Many an Altmer has been captured by the Sload, and a few have escaped to tell of the brackish lagoon in the center of the island chain. There the buoyant creatures may move about with relative quickness and grace, through an intricate network of coral formations and ancient shipwrecks.

The reach of Thras has been felt far beyond its own land. The Thrassian Plague which decimated Tamriel's population in the year 2260 of the First Era was their most egregious attack against the mainland, but other, subtler predations have also been recorded. When the Redguards came to Tamriel in 1E 808, they brought with them a tradition of burying their criminals on islands off their shore, to prevent their evil spirits from disturbing the living. The Sload took advantage of these graveyards off the coast, finding them suitable laboratories for their necromancy. The Redguards pushed back against the invaders, but reports of Sload living near settled lands from Stros M'Kai to Abibon-Gora have surfaced well into the Third Era.

In the past thirty years, things have been quiet in the western seas, and the hero of the Sload, the so-called King of Worms, Mannimarco, has likewise ceased to trouble Tamriel. It may be that they slank back into their dark seas together. That is the more hopeful assumption.

PYANDONEA

IT WAS ONCE BELIEVED THAT THE MAORMER OF PYANDONEA were originally exiles from the Summerset Isle, but while it is likely they came from similar Aldmeri ancestors, they certainly did not come from Summerset. Translations of tapestries in the Crystal Tower tell the tale of a far older enmity. The Maormer were likely separated from the ancient Aldmer not in Summerset, but in their original homeland of Aldmeris.

Orgnum, their leader and self-styled "King," according to the legend, was a phenomenally wealthy Aldmer nobleman, who used his finances to launch a rebellion against the powers of the land. He and his followers were banished for this to a place separated from Aldmeris by an impenetrable mist, Pyandonea, "The Veil of Mist." This boundary proved so effective that the followers of Orgnum never again disturbed their former countrymen. The new Aldmeri homeland of Summerset, however, was not so lucky.

For much of Summerset's history, the Maormer have launched attacks against their sister child of Aldmeris. Every one of these battles have been led by Orgnum himself, who it seems is not only immortal, but grows more youthful by the century. No historian, to the knowledge of the staff of the Imperial Geographic Society, has counted the number of wars and number of strategies employed against Summerset, but somehow each has proved, no matter how ingenious, an ultimate failure.

One attack in particular is worthy of mention, as it gives us our only glimpse into the actual landscape of Pyandonea. In the year 2E 486, a small Maormeri fleet was sighted off the coast of Alinor, and King Hidellith ordered his navy to give chase. The navy followed the ships through uncharted waters, into an ambush in Pyandonea itself. Most of the Alinori navy was destroyed, but a single warship returned to Summerset to describe the land as a "sea jungle." Massive plateaus spilling over with vegetation form mazes around valleys of ocean. Waving tendrils of kelp trap all but the Maormer's own ships, and provide a well-camouflaged home for the sea serpents that are Orgnum's guards and occasional mounts. Mist storms spill over the land, further disorienting one's views. That even one ship survived the visit is a testament to the maritime genius of the Altmer.

The last documented appearance of the Maormer was in 3E 110 in the War of the Isle. The storm brewed by the Psijics of Artaeum, it was said, so annihilated Orgnum's fleet that he was never again able to muster together enough of a force to dare another battle. The mists to the south reveal nothing to corroborate or refute this belief, but one can hope.

AKAVIR

THRAS AND PYANDONEA HAVE BEEN IMPLACABLE enemies of Summerset and parts of western Tamriel for thousands of years, but the deadliest adversary — and most influential alien culture since the coming of the Aldmer and Atmorans — has been Akavir. The mysterious land to the east of Tamriel has been our opponent numerous times, and still we know little about them.

Their first appearance in history was as pirates, which we may now assume were also scouts for the eventual invasions. Ships manned by bizarre beastfolk bewildered and horrified the earliest inhabitants of Tamriel. Contemporary scholars find references to pirates with rat-like features, and still others who appeared canine, suggesting Akaviri cultures yet undiscovered and perhaps extinct. Then, of course, there are the dragons, Akavir's most deadly and beautiful former native child. The very name "Akavir," in fact, means "Dragon Land."

In the 2703rd year of the First Era, Tamriel first faced an organized armada of Tsaesci, the so-called "Akaviri Snakemen", and met the challenge with a resounding victory in the Pale Pass of Skyrim. The Emperor Reman was so impressed by the exotic weaponry and battle prowess of his defeated foe that he and his heirs allowed them to rise from prisoners to advisors of the second Empire of Tamriel. Eventually, they became, on the death of Emperor Reman III in the year 2920, the Potentates of Tamriel, and the defeated Akaviri ruled the land for over 400 years.

It is from this era that we know most of what we do know of the land of Akavir. In addition to the Tsaesci, Akavir is said to be home to several other bestial and peculiar creatures: the monkeys of Tang Mo, the snow demons of Kamal, and the tiger dragons of Ka Po'Tun. It should be noted that these various races of Akaviri have never been sighted by modern scholars. While tales that survive from the Akaviri Potentate describe these races in detail, it is unknown how literally they should be taken, given the possible mistranslation of the complex Tsaesci language.

Tamriel met Akavir's aggression many centuries later when Emperor Uriel V, a military genius by any measure, was so ambitious as to attempt an invasion of Akavir based on the Tsaesci intelligence of the Second Era. This proved to be a catastrophe, cumulating with the loss of the Emperor and his entire army in Akavir at the Battle of Ionith in 3E 290.

While our battles with Akavir are likely far from over, their influence on Tamrielic culture has not been uniformly negative. The exotic weaponry and armor they used in the First Era has been adopted by warriors throughout the continent, and their dragon has been adopted as one of the most potent symbols of the Septim Empire.

YOKUDA

AMONG THE ORIGINAL HOMELANDS OF THE PEOPLE OF the people of Tamriel, we know far more about Yokuda than we do about the others, Aldmeris and Atmora. The Yokudans came to the shores of Volenfell (now Hammerfell) in the First Era, when chroniclers had begun to be more meticulous and less fanciful in the details. They also brought with them memorystones and a rich heritage they were proud to share in epic tales.

The continent of Yokuda is no more, but it was once a place where rocky, barren hills were matched by the fecund combination of sophisticated agriculture, politics, and warfare. It was a harsh environment, training the Yokudans well for their lives in Tamriel. The Yokuda civil wars of the 4th and 8th centuries prepared them for their future conflicts, and the unwelcoming desert of Volenfell only yielded fruit and grain because of the experience the Yokudans had in their even more arid homeland.

It is debated to this day what the nature of the disaster was that destroyed Yokuda. Tremors of the earth were not uncommon in the continent's history, and many argue that it was simply a natural catastrophic series of quakes at the foundation of the land. Others suggest that it may have had human origins: during the last civil war, a renegade band of Ansei called the Hiradirge were said to be masters of stone magic. When they were defeated in battle in 1E 792, the argument goes, they had their revenge on the entire land, destroying what they would never rule.

ALDMERIS

VIRTUALLY NOTHING IS KNOWN OF THE ELVEN homeland. Its location, its environment, its politics, its religion, even its current existence are the stuff of conjecture. Translations from the ancient tapestries and texts in the Crystal Tower of Summerset have yielded only the barest of sketches of a beautiful but very strange land. In no representation of Aldmeris are there any trees or life but the Aldmer themselves. It appears always as an endless city, built upon itself over and over again, until no nature remains at all. The highest towers are reserved for interring the dead, a tradition continued on in the Crystal Tower itself.

What has happened in Aldmeris since the elves who settled in Tamriel left is perhaps the oldest of all mysteries. For countless centuries, adventurers have sought "Lost Aldmeris," only to return disappointed, if they return at all. Some say that Aldmeris was sunk into the sea by the angry gods of the Aldmer. Others claim that the elven homeland has left Mundus, and will only return when the races of mer are united as one.

ATMORA

FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS IN THE MERETHIC ERA, RAIDERS crossed the Sea of Ghosts to invade Tamriel from the frozen lands of Atmora, becoming after generations of living in our land the Nords, Cyrodiils, and Bretons of today. The last invasion – if that is the word for two ships, largely laden with corpses, begging to make port – occurred in the 68th year of the First Era. The descriptions of the land these raiders had left changes radically over the years, leaving many to believe that it was gradually dying, smothered by frost. Expeditions to Atmora in modern times describe a place of permanent winter, with little life and no sign of human habitation. Whatever population did not succeed in fleeing to Tamriel doubtless succumbed to the ever-worsening climate many centuries ago.

Even before the frost fall, Atmora was apparently not a temperate place. The early Nedic peoples who came from Atmora were hunters with no knowledge of agriculture. A land where every denizen was a predator doubtless insured that only the most brutal and savage survived. It is easy to see how these traits passed the raider men and down to the nature of the Arena of Tamriel.

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